La Storia di un Altro: Adaptations and Appropriations in the Works of Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini

Matthew Lee Harper

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Approved by:

Antonio Illiano

Ennio Rao

Gregory Flaxman

Amy Chambless

José Polo de Bernabé

ABSTRACT

La Storia di un Altro: Adaptations and Appropriations in the Works of Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini
(Under the direction of Antonio Illiano)

Cesare Zavattini and Vittorio De Sica played an important role in Italian postwar cinema. Their collaborations were some of the most renowned films of the Neorealist movement and have influenced generations of directors. Zavattini was known as the most vocal proponent of neorealist cinema and through his advocacy for the movement he produced a significant body of theoretical and critical work. The wealth of his cinematic theories is is virtually unknown to American and English scholars and is often reduced to a single article translated into English; "Some Ideas on the Cinema." Though the chosen article is one of his most important essays, and it is often published in film theory anthologies, it is unfortunate that the depth of Zavattini's theories, and it has led some critics to interpret his approach to cinema as anti-literary.

The present study seeks to evaluate the relationship of Zavattini's and De Sica's cinematic collaborations with literature. Many of their most celebrated films (*I bambini ci guardano*, *Ladri di biciclette*, *Miracolo a Milano*, *L'oro di Napoli*, *La ciociara*) were literary adaptations. Of the twenty-three films they made together,

eight were based on literary sources. Furthermore, the duo were very involved in the promotion of episode films, which have a structural link to literary culture in that they are essentially cinematic versions of short story collections and frame tales, such as Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Between the eight adaptations and the six episode films the two collaborated on, a significant portion of their oeuvre proves to have significant ties (either direct, or indirect) to literary structures and works. Particular emphasis to several, but not all, of their literary adaptations to film will be given, with a focus on works produced during the duo's most productive phase: between the early Forties and the mid Fifties. The present study not only provides the reader with much needed analysis of some of their lesser known works but also offers a means of interpreting significant films in the collaborative career of two of Italy's most important filmmakers.

A quelle che m'hanno sostenuto con lacrime, grida e amore:

Donatella, Eliana ed Alessia

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Introduction

In a short documentary film about Cesare Zavattini and Vittorio De Sica produced in the early 1960's for television, the two remember their first encounter, which took place in Milano. As Vittorio De Sica recalls, they were introduced by Adolfo Franci, one of the producers who were responsible for much of the success of Italian cinema after World War II. Hence the beginnings of their 45 year friendship, which resulted in the production of over 17 films together, of which three won academy awards, and five were nominated for them.

Their success has generated a modest critical bibliography, which is surprising given their contributions to the Neorealist movement of the 1940s and 50s. In the preface to a collection of articles entitled *De Sica: autore, regista, attore* (1992), Lino Micciché remarks on the dearth of critical work done on Vittorio De Sica.

> Viene da chiedersi perché la bibliografia internazionale, e forse soprattutto nazionale, su Vittorio De Sica sia così relativamente avara di studi approfonditi, meditate monografie, analisi filologicamente accurate dei 31 testi cinematografici desichiani. *Perché*, insomma, se in Francia siamo fermi a due libri (uno del 1955 e uno del 1966!), se gli studi anglofoni né più numerosi né più recenti, e se, aggiungendovi le monografie in lingua spagnola

> (inclusa l'America Latina), portoghese (incluso il Brasile) e tedesca, nonché quelle edite in Europa Orientale (inclusa l'ex URSS, dove in qualche caso il cinema desichiano fu addirittura assunto a modello), non arriviamo neppure a dieci titoli, fra cui nessuno recente; *perché*, si diceva, se così poco è stato pubblicato all'estero, anche in Italia — dove pure il De Sica dell'età aurea fu autorevolmente definito il maggiore narratore italiano dell'epoca — non si va oltre un saggio di 21 paginette di Bazin (in un libretto del 1953, che con note, biografia, filmografia e bibliografia non arriva a 80 pagine), un pregevole number di "Bianco e Nero" del 1975 con 100 pagine di saggi e 250 di "materiali" e "strumenti" (curato da O. Caldiron), "un castoro" del 1980 (opera di F. Pecori), e la trentina di pagine in un volume di 142, (inclusi "materiali" e illustrazioni) del saggio di F. Bolzoni su "Quando De Sica era Mister Brown" (1984); mentre è soltanto annunciata, ma lungi dall'essere imminente, la prima, corposa "biografia critica" su De Sica autore e attore, scritta a quattro mani da C. Cosulich e T. Kezich? E questo mentre, per limitarci a qualche esempio, è quasi sterminata la bibliografia (internazionale e italiana) su Fellini e Rossellini, sono ricchissime quelle su Visconti e Antonioni, abbastanza ricca quella su Pasolini cineasta, abbondante quella su B. Bertolucci, in crescendo quella su Olmi e su Moretti, e quasi ogni autore "medio alto" e "medio" del cinema italiano può contare su studi monografici recenti o recentissimi? (vii)

In a similar manner, eight years later, in the introduction to *Vittorio De Sica: Contemporary Perspectives* Howard Curle and Stephen Snyder state the following about the lack of attention given to De Sica in English-language studies:

> In contrast to the major figures of post-World War II Italian cinema – Rossellini, Fellini, Antonioni, Visconti – Vittorio De Sica has been relatively neglected in English-language film criticism. The commentaries that do exist have tended to reduce his career to one or two significant films. At the present time the only full-length study of De Sica's work in English is John Daretta's *Vittorio De Sica : A Guide to References and Resources* (1982), which presents primarily a summary of his career and a critical bibliography. (3)

Curle and Howard validate Micciché's statement, the list of critical works dedicated to Vittorio De Sica in any language is very short indeed when compared to his contemporaries. Unfortunately, their contribution does little to expand the critical body as the majority of articles presented in the collection were originally published some twenty to thirty years prior to their appearance in *Vittorio De Sica: Contemporary Perspectives*.

Despite the passing of seventeen years since Micciché first offered that extensive list of publications, it has not lengthened by any great measure. In 1997, Andrea Alonge published an in-depth study on *Ladri di biciclette*.[1] More recently Robert Gordon, in collaboration with the British Film Institute, produced a brief monograph on *Ladri* as well to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the film's release.[2]

Cesare Zavattini, on the other hand has fared better, at least in his own nation. Italian critics have generated a respectable body of work on Zavattini with Lina Angioletti's *Invito alla lettura di Cesare Zavattini* published in 1979 as the first monographic study dedicated to Zavattini. Since then several well thought out works, including Guglielmo Moneti's *Lessico zavattiniano: parole e idee su cinema e dintorni*, published in 1992 as a sort of critical dictionary that provided

[1]Andrea Giaime Alonge. *Vittorio De Sica: Ladri di biciclette* (Torino: Lindau, 1997).

[2]Robert Gordon. *Bicycle thieves [Ladri di biciclette]* (New York: BFI, 2008).

essays for nearly 20 different key terms and aspects of Zavattini's career from art and photography to cinema and literature. Giacomo Gambetti, a long time friend of Zavattini, has also published several monographs regarding Zavattini's theoretical works on cinema, as well as a more biographical work tracing his career chronologically.[3] Despite the reasonable treatment Zavattini has received within his own country, he is virtually unknown to American and English scholars. The wealth of his cinematic theories is reduced to a single article translated into English; "Some Ideas on the Cinema." Though the chosen article is one of his most important essays, and it is often published in film theory anthologies, it is unfortunate that the depth of Zavattini's theories, which go far beyond what is captured in that brief essay and well beyond cinematic topics, are unknown to the anglophone world.

Although the two were considered by contemporaries as among of the best of their time and all agree that their works shaped and drove the Neorealist movement, thereby influencing generations of directors not only in Italy and Europe but in many different nations, scholars and critics have only been able to generate a handful of articles and one or two volumes. Micciché offers several reasons for the lack of scholarly attention to De Sica's work in particular. First, the varied nature of De Sica's career (officially directed thirty-one films and acted

[3]Giacomo Gambetti. *Cesare Zavattini: cinema e vita* (Bologna: Bora, 1996); and *Zavattini, mago e tecnico.* (Roma: Ente dello spettacolo, 1986).

in over one hundred and fifty others, he also had a very successful stage career); second, the erratic quality of his films; third, critical orthodoxies have been unable to view the issues, themes, and humanity brought to the forefront by the duo; and fourth, the difficulty of determining De Sica's role in his collaborations with Zavattini, which total twenty-three (vii). The difficulty in approaching the vast variety of their careers is significantly daunting. Even if one were to just focus on the De Sica-Zavattini collaborations, the variety of styles and issues of periodization cause a comprehensive analysis to be overwhelming. When faced with length of their careers (over forty-five years), it becomes evident that in order to successfully approach their collaboration one must find an adequate instrumentation of analysis, restrict the topic and films to be analyzed, and determine the nature of the duo's collaboration within that time frame.

It is in this spirit that the present project seeks to find fertile ground, by limiting the topic to the relationship Zavattini and De Sica had with literary adaptations, focusing on specific films that best illustrate the nature of their collaboration. Many of their most celebrated films (*I bambini ci guardano*, *Ladri di biciclette*, *Miracolo a Milano*, *L'oro di Napoli*, *La ciociara*) were literary adaptations. Eight of their twenty-three films were based on literary sources, two of which Zavattini took from his own list of publications.[4] Furthermore, the duo were

[4]*Miracolo a Milano* (1951) and *Il boom* (1963) were both adapted from works (a book in the case of the prior and a short story in the case of the latter) that Zavattini originally wrote.

very involved in the promotion of episode films, which have a structural link to literary culture in that they are essentially cinematic versions of short story collections and frame tales, such as Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Between the eight adaptations and the six episode films the two collaborated on, a significant portion of their oeuvre proves to have significant ties (either direct, or indirect) to literary structures and works. Particular emphasis to several, but not all, of their literary adaptations to film will be given, with a focus on works produced during the duo's most productive phase: between the early Forties and the mid Fifties.

Chapter 1 focuses on Zavattini's theories on cinema, his literary career, and offers a comparison with the poetics of Giovanni Verga and the *veristi* of the late nineteenth century. In his theoretical writings, Zavattini repeatedly objected to the use of literary sources and contrived plots as a source for the cinema, instead preferring that screenwriters and producers be eliminated from the creative process and that directors take their cue from the everyday reality that surrounds them. Though different in their means, both Zavattini and Verga resisted traditional methods of representation and sought to use reality as a means of narration. The two had similar ideas with regards to the role of the artist and his duty to present reality in as unmediated a form as possible. Ultimately this analysis will offer a new way of looking at Zavattini's critical work as a part of a greater whole that sets the foundation for us to begin to

understand the complex relationship he had with literature and to move beyond the traditional dichotomy which necessitates that he be classified as either literary or cinematic towards a point where he can be seen as a fusion of the two.

Chapter 2 discusses three of De Sica and Zavattini's literary adaptations: *I bambini ci guardano*, *Ladri di biciclette*, and *Miracolo a Milano*. The chapter begins with a survey of recent critical work in adaptation studies and offers several categories of adaptation that will provide a structural and theoretical framework for the analysis of each adaptation. Genette's study on transtextuality serves as the foundation for the analyses provided. The relationships between the hypertext (the adapted film) and the hypotext (the original novel) are explored, thereby bringing to light the complexities that exist within the two media. In the case of *Miracolo a Milano* the adaptive process that De Sica and Zavattini employed will be analyzed, giving specific attention to the various permutations of Zavattini's original story.

The final chapter details the origins of episode cinema, its status as an Italian phenomenon, and the ways in which De Sica and Zavattini employed the format to push the boundaries of cinematic narration. While most films can be considered episodic, an episode film is unique in that it presents a collection of cinematic short stories as an omnibus film. Episode cinema played an important financial and artistic role in Italian cinema, especially during the Fifties and

Sixties, but as a genre it does not receive much scholarly attention. Although Rossellini brought episode cinema to the forefront of international cinema with his 1946 film *Paisà*, Zavattini's interest in creating episode films can be traced back to the late Thirties. Despite the fact that their first episode film was not released until 1954, Zavattini and De Sica played a fundamental role in legitimizing the episode film. *Amore in città*, and *Siamo donne* were influential films that allowed Zavattini to experiment with his theories on neorealism and expand the horizons of the movement. The chapter also analyzes *L'oro di Napoli*, a 1954 film adapted from the eponymous collection of short stories written by Giuseppe Marotta and *Boccaccio '70*, a film conceived by Zavattini in which various directors, including De Sica participated. The method of analysis employed for these films is based on Genette's study of paratexts. In short, episode cinema, and in particular early episode cinema, employs a variety of paratextual elements to create a structure in which the episodes are united as a harmonious whole rather than a cacophony of competing narratives.

In the aftermath of World War II, Italian society underwent many changes and as a result the means of narrating, both cinematic and literary, changed. De Sica and Zavattini were at the forefront of this metamorphosis. They utilized innovative adaptive techniques and infused their original films with literary narrative models. Their use of literary schemata to create new modes of

cinematic narration demonstrates the way in which the two artists created an intertexual tapestry of cinematic and literary narrative modes. The present study not only provides the reader with much needed analysis of some of their lesser known works but also offers a means of interpreting significant films in the collaborative career of two of Italy's most important filmmakers.

Chapter 1

Zavattini Teorico: The Cinematic Theories of Cesare Zavattini

Within the Italian artistic tradition, reality and its representation play a crucial role in defining cultural discourse. One needs only look to the paintings of Giotto, Cimabue, Michelangelo, Titian, Caravaggio, Tintoretto, or the sculptures of Bernini and many others to understand why the Italian realist and mimetic tradition dominated Western visual culture. Furthermore, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, or the treatises of Machiavelli, Castiglione, or Guicciardini all give a sense of the reality of their times. Indeed, one could consider the realist tradition an essential national cultural discourse, as it has so often made its way to the forefront of Italian artistic and literary expressions.

During the 19th century, Western literature saw a shift in the types of characters and narratives employed by authors of all nationalities. Authors such as Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, Stendhal, and Balzac contributed to and shaped this trend by creating works about average, ordinary people. Some critics feel that their creative developments laid the foundation on which the modern novel rests, and eventually all realist cinema and literature can be traced back to them (Armes 17-19).

In an Italian context, Alessandro Manzoni must be credited for the introduction of realism to modern Italian literature, in particular the modern Italian novel. *I promessi sposi*, though not usually classified within the realist canon, does contain elements of realism, particularly in the choice of protagonists – two peasants whose impending nuptials are interrupted by the plotting of Don Rodrigo, the local feudal lord. The deliberate choice of Renzo and Lucia as the central protagonists represents a shift in the attitude towards reality and its representation. However, it would not be until the latter half of the 19th century with the rise of Giovanni Verga and the *veristi* that authors would formally begin to develop a method of representing reality.

Verismo, and in particular Giovanni Verga, revolutionized not only the type of stories and protagonists that were narrated, but also how and why those stories were conceived and narrated. Verga's influence on Italian culture has reverberated through the decades. It is well documented that Verga served as an inspiration and a model for early Italian neorealist cinema. Giuseppe De Santis and Mario Alicata's famous "Verità e poesia: Verga e il cinema italiano" is widely known and translated. The article clearly indicates a shift in Italian cinema towards the representation of reality, yet it is by no means a highly theoretical text, nor is it truly representative of the movement as a whole. Many questions still abound regarding the status of Verga and Italian neorealist cinema, a study

which is somewhat beyond the scope of the present work, but related to the topic of Neorealism's chief theoretical exponent, Cesare Zavattini. Zavattini did not play a direct role in the pre-war debate regarding cinematic realism. He was just beginning to dedicate himself more to screenwriting for the cinema and was better known in literary circles than in cinematic groups. He became the champion of neorealism some ten years after the Verga debate took place. In fact, a the debate he was involved with in the early Fifties was similar in that it regarded to the use of 19th century literary texts as the basis for producing realist cinema and Zavattini emphatically opposed such an approach. Perhaps for this reason his theories have never been analyzed and compared to those of Verga, leaving us with many questions regarding the dialectic between the early neorealist debate and the latter, final debate. If, as has been successfully argued in other forums, Givanni Verga's poetics and literary works are at the head, or at the very least play a prominent role in the early stages of Italian neorealism, then how did the movement integrate veristic poetics or themes? How, if at all, did Verga's poetics influence or affect Cesare Zavattini's theories regarding cinema? What was the influence and relationship between Verism/Verga and Zavattini? These are the questions we will try to answer in this chapter. To do so we must begin with Verga, his poetics and postulations about literature and narrative, analyze Verga's influence on the *Cinema* group of the late Thirties and Forties

(namely De Santis and Alicata), as well as understand what similarities exist between Verghian literary poetics, and Zavattinian cinematic theories.

Verga and Verismo

Giovanni Verga, born to a wealthy family in Catania, began to write at a very young age. He was known for historical novels that carried adventurous, romantic, and patriotic themes. His first novel, *I carbonari della montagna* (1861) was inspired by the acts of a Calabrese branch of the Carbonari (a secret revolutionary society dedicated to Italian independence). Other sentimental novels such as *Una peccatrice* (1866) and *Storia di una capinera* (1871) followed, as Verga moved first to Florence, and then to Milan, where he encountered the likes of Arrigo Boito, Giuseppe Giacosa, and Salvatore Farina, who were firmly entrenched in the *Scapigliatura* movement, which was a bohemian group of artists who rebelled against the romantic and provincial nature of the "official" Italian culture that came out of the Risorgimento. The *Scapigliati* advocated a type of dualistic conscience which emphasized the contrast between the ideal (as proposed by the Romantics) and the truth, raw reality described in an objective, even anatomical manner. The *Scapigliati* adherents are not so much remembered for their artistic contributions as they are for the catalyst that they provided for

Verga and other veristic writers.

Beginning in the mid 1870s and continuing throughout the next decade, Verga would undertake a complete revision of his approach to literature, drastically changing his language and refining his style towards a more realist approach. From the French naturalists a doctrine of objective and scientific representation had arrived in Italy. It was labeled as the theory of impersonality, which is to say that the emphasis was placed on the position of the author with respect to the reality being narrated. The assignment of the author was to record the nature of the world and its events without intervening or modifying them, and above all without worrying about formulating any sort of judgment. Obviously, the theory posed several problems for literary critics because it authorized the representation of the slums and situations of extreme degradation, both moral and social, without expressing any sort of explicit condemnation or judgment (Lo Castro 47-48).

Verga began to experiment with this new technique and he was able to alter it so that the author is not only distanced from the narrative but his presence is minimalized to the point that, in theory, the work of art seems to have created itself. Impersonality for Verga becomes not only a means of distancing the author from the work, and therefore removing any sort of explicit, outside judgment offered on the reality narrated, but also a means of using

internal narrators to offer comments and opinions. This choral effect offers a much richer means of narration than those provided by the French models and it also skirts the issue of representing morally reprehensible acts without judgment. Though somewhat more subjective than the naturalists intended because of the "personal" interests of internal narrators, Verga's method becomes a programmatical means of narration that is undertaken from within the world of the narrated reality.

Verga was not a theoretician. He did not expound at great length on the potential his art had . He did, however, make several public and private statements that give insight as to the intentions and ramifications of his literary creations. The most famous of these declarations is found in the preface to "L'amante di Gramigna". Originally entitled "L'amante di Raja" and published in early 1880 in Salvatore Farina's *Rivista minima*, the novella was recast in its definitive form in the 1881 collection *Vita dei campi*. The preface is essentially a dedicatory letter to Farina, explaining the theoretical underpinnings of the novella. It is one of the earliest documents recording the explicit change in Verga's poetics and it is essential to understanding Verga's veristic works.

Verga begins first of all by grounding his brief novella in an historical, and therefore, real context. "Esso almeno avrà il merito di esser brevissimo, di esser storico – un documento umano. . ." (*Tutte le novelle* 202). The term "historical" is

not to be confused with the romantic use of the historical novel, such as *I promessi sposi*, where the author created fictional characters and placed them within an historical context. The French naturalists and Italian verists both privileged narratives that were based on facts of reality. Verga clarifies this with the term "documento umano," which is important to understand in that it is a direct reference to Zola, who valued a scientific observation, analysis, and an objective narration of reality, thus producing a work that, in his opinion, contained much more force than any imaginary, or idealized work of art could produce. For Zola (and in turn Verga) the object of the artist was to produce cultural documents which, through the rigorous observation and documentation of the author, were inextricably linked to humanity and thereby reality.

Verga continues about the necessity to find stories that are based on actual events:

> Il semplice fatto umano farà pensare sempre; avrà sempre l'efficacia dell'*essere stato*, delle lagrime vere, delle febbri e delle sensazioni che sono passate per la carne; il misterioso processo per cui le passioni si annodano, si intrecciano, maturano, si svolgono nel loro cammino sotterraneo nei loro andirivieni che spesso sembrano contraddittori, costituirà per lungo tempo ancora la possente attrattiva di quel fenomeno psicologico che dicesi l'argomento di un racconto, e che l'analisi moderna si studia di seguire con scrupolo scientifico. Di questo che ti narro oggi ti dirò soltanto il punto di partenza e quello d'arrivo, e per te basterà, e un giorno forse basterà per tutti. (*Tutte le novelle* 202)

The insistence on the efficacy of reality as the driving force behind any sort of

narrative is affirmed once more, as is the need of modern, scientific analysis. However, the analysis is not offered by the narrator, nor the author. The author is more concerned about reporting facts as they are rather than interpreting them. Creating narratives using real events and people becomes a means to represent phenomenal reality. Domenico Tanteri cites a report that appeared in "Fanfulla della Domenica" where Verga further expanded on the unconventional notion of altering modes of narration to become wholly based on real events:

> Una sera Oreste [Verga] venne al caffè Biffi con un'idea che a nessuno di noi parve nuova, ma che doveva senza dubbio, riuscirà novissima nell'applicazione rigorosa che il coscienzioso romanziere si proponeva di farne alla novella e al romanzo. L'idea è questa: l'arte deve cessare di essere soggettiva; l'arte si va facendo e diventerà a poco a poco tutta oggettiva: vi saranno le lagrime e le risate delle cose, ma si cancelleranno dalle pagine dei libri il pianto e il riso dello scrittore. E lo studio psicologico diventerà man mano così facile e così comune, che il romanziere non dovrà far altro che dare la traccia al lettore, finché il romanzo si ridurrà alla cronaca cittadina pura e semplice. . . (317)

This thirst for reality and the desire to document it is an essential element of the *veristi* of the late 19th century. Verga, Capuana, and many other ethnographers spent great amounts of time and resources researching, interviewing, and documenting Sicilians in their actual state. There was also a push towards documenting traditional fables and stories that the peasants told and retold. All of this work went into the short stories and novels that Verga produced.

Another aspect of Verga's poetics includes the deliberate, linguistic choices made in the narration. Once again, in the letter to Farina he states:

> Io te lo ripeterò così come l'ho raccolto pei viottoli dei campi, press'a poco colle medesime parole semplici e pittoresche della narrazione popolare, e tu veramente preferirai di trovarti faccia a faccia col fatto nudo e schietto, senza stare a cercarlo fra le linee del libro, attraverso la lente dello scrittore. (*Tutte le novelle* 202)

This passage offers two salient points that merit discussion. First, Verga deliberately chooses to employ a "popular narration", which is to say that rather than impose a highly literary, and artificial language to narrate the events of the story, Verga chooses to represent the events in question on their own terms, using language that came from their world, from the characters involved, not from the norms and conventions of the literary world. To accomplish such a task, yet still communicate in a standard Italian that was accessible, Verga adopted a limited vocabulary that included more common linguistic forms. He altered his syntax to include traces of Sicilian dialect, simplifying it as well. In short, he chose to tell it as had heard it by the wayside in the fields, which is a shift towards mimicking the oral traditions that were prevalent in Sicily and other regions of Italy. His version of the story was to be just another voice amongst the many who had already told the same story time and time again. The prioritization of a popular, at times colloquial narration is an open rejection of traditional literary conventions. One could say that the rejection of the norm is

indeed an anti-literary position, that is to say that Verga's veristic works are in direct opposition with what was deemed as literature at the time.

The second aspect of this passage that merits discussion is found in the last line regarding "the lens of the writer", which is a direct reference to the technique of impersonality inherited from the French naturalists. It implies, of course, that the "sketch of a story" he is to narrate will be objective, a simple recounting of the facts, as they could have been told by one of the story's characters, not by the author. A dichotomy between narrator and author is established. The author is eclipsed and the story itself takes a nearly autonomous place with the narrator an integrated, contextual element of the narration itself. Verga embraced the technique of impersonality and he furthered it by seeking to reduce the presence of the author, to remove it altogether if possible. Later on in the letter he states:

> . . . io credo che il trionfo del romanzo, la più completa e la più umana delle opere d'arte, si raggiungerà allorché l'affinità e la coesione di ogni sua parte sarà così completa, che il processo della creazione rimarrà un mistero, come lo svolgersi delle passioni umane, e l'armonia delle sue forme sarà così perfetta, la sincerità della sua realtà così evidente, il suo modo la sua ragione di essere necessarie, che la mano dell'artista rimarrà assolutamente invisibile, allora avrà l'impronta dell'avvenimento reale, l'opera d'arte sembrerà *essersi fatta da sè*; aver maturato ed esser sorta spontanea come un fatto naturale, senza serbare alcun punto di contatto col suo autore; che essa non serbi nelle sue forme viventi alcuna impronta della mente in cui germogliò, alcuna ombra dell'occhio che la intravvide [. . .] che è come dev'essere ed è necessario che sia, palpitante di vita ed immutabile al pari di una statua di bronzo, di

> cui l'autore abbia avuto il coraggio divino di eclissarsi e sparire nella sua opera immortale. (*Tutte le novelle* 202)

Verga wanted to reach the pinnacle of objectivity, that is to create a work that seemed to have been created by itself. A work in which the hand of the author not only was distanced, and impersonal, but was invisible, and contained absolutely no connection with the work at all. He wanted not only to reduce the contact between the narrative and the author, but eliminate it as far as possible. The revolutionary nature of this statement is that the artist is to push the conventions of representation to the point that the narrative will have the capacity to become one day so evident in its search for truth that any dramatic development of the facts will become superfluous — a day in which the novel with all its conventions would become obsolete. In a way, this call for the eclipse of the author is tantamount to removing any sort of intermediary between reality and the reader. If a work of art really can be said to exist by itself, without having been created by an artist, then it follows that the work can be considered as a direct contact with reality. This concept is best expressed by Giorgio Arcoleo, student of De Sanctis and good friend of Verga, who stated that the novel (which had already become the major literary genre of the time) could be surpassed only "quando la società sia giunta a tale raffinatezza di coltura, a tal sensibilità d'impressione, da far a meno dei passaggi intermedi" (40).

The influence of Verga on Italian narrative proved to be profound. Many

of the most successful writers in the early twentieth century actively participated in the veristic movements and at one time or another were associated with it. Verism even carried over into the theater where Pietro Mascagni and Verga collaborated in creating an operatic adaptation of "Cavalleria rusticana", which became an international success. Early Italian directors unsuccessfully sought to adapt Verga's works to the screen, but the author refused to allow it.[1] Nonetheless, veristic and Verghian themes did find their way into Italian cinema, with such films as Nino Martoglio's *Sperduti nel buio*, though it is perhaps most evident in Italian post-war cinema and neorealism, as the movement's foundational moment revolves around the well-known article written in 1942 by Giuseppe De Santis and Mario Alicata.

Verga e Poesia

During the 1930s Italian cinema saw an increase both in the quality and quantity of films produced. The creation of the state-funded Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia aided in the training of young directors. Luigi Chiarini, Umberto Barbaro, and Alessandro Blasetti all played influential roles in

[1]For an interesting analysis on Verga's reticence towards his works being adapted to the screen see Maira's article: "Di scorcio, di sottinteso quasi," in *Incontri con il cinema italiano*, ed. Antonio Vitti (Rome: Sciascia, 2003) 235-46.

forming and shaping the rising generation of filmmakers. Barbaro, in particular, translated the works of Russian director/theorists, Pudovkin, Vertov, and Eisenstein. Despite fascist sponsorship of the Centro Sperimentale, budding Italian directors were exposed to all of the critical discussion that surrounded international cinema. Discussions and debates regarding the realistic nature of cinema began to take place in the critical dialogue that played out in the journals and papers of the time. As early as 1928 Barbaro began to assert that the greatest error any cinematographer could make was to abandon reality in favor of fantasy. Later, the discussion would center around finding and developing a national cinematic language. It should come as no surprise that those from *Bianco e Nero* (the Centro Sperimentale's in-house journal) promoted the use of realism and realistic representation of Italian daily life as the most perfect end to the cinema.[2]

In the fall of 1941, Giuseppe De Santis and Mario Alicata published their important article "Verità e poesia: Verga e il cinema italiano" in the Centro Sperimentale's influential journal *Cinema*, De Santis and Alicata argued that all great cinema has taken its inspiration from great literature:

> Quando ebbe risolti alcuni problemi tecnici, il cinema, da *documentario* divenuto racconto, comprese che alla letteratura era legato il suo destino. Nonostante le sciocche pretese dei cineasti

[2]For an insightful analysis of the precursors to the neorealists see Brunetta's *Cent'anni di cinema italiano 1. Dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Roma: Laterza, 1995) 236-80.

> *puri*, da quel giorno strettissimi rapporti continuarono a correre tra cinema e letteratura: fino a collocare spontaneamente la storia del cinema come insostituibile capitolo nella storia del gusto letterario e artistico del Novecento. (Alicata & De Santis 216)

They continue, citing the many different national cinemas that had been influenced by literary figures. Yet, they point out, the Italian cinema almost always produced literary adaptations from low-level literary works that were either full of rhetoric and evaded contemporary social issues and circumstances, or took great pains not to offend fascist censors, thereby succeeding in eviscerating the few qualities found in the original work, yet at the same time failing to create any innovative cinematic techniques. They coined the term "calligraphic" style, which is now widely used to describe fascist cinema in general, although they intended it to refer more specifically to the literary adaptations that had been produced under the regime. They proposed a return to the grand nineteenth century realist narratives of Giovanni Verga, whose work, they believed, was a revolutionary art, capable of inspiring "la fantasia di un cinema che cerca le cose e fatti in un tempo e spazio di realtà, per salvarsi dai suggerimenti facili d'un gusto borghese e mortificato" (Alicata and De Santis 217).

In response to De Santis's and Alicata's assertions Fausto Montesanti wrote a rebuttal, which rejected any possible influences of literary sources. His argument, grounded firmly on the ideas advanced by Soviet theorists Pudovkin

and Eisenstein, stated that although cinema had always been seen as inferior to literature, it was its own art. Therefore, producing films that had literary sources took away from the cinema's autonomy and reduced it to a recycling bin for other, already used narratives. His argument is interesting because essentially he stated that film and literature had different signifying systems and that meaning did not necessarily transfer from one to the other. In a very concrete way he anticipated issues that would not come to the forefront of theory until the late sixties. However, towards the end of the essay, Montesanti compromises his ideals of purity by admitting that there have been cinematic adaptations that were purely cinematic and he accepts them as masterpieces. Unfortunately, his ultimate criterion is not based upon literary influence, but personal taste. If he feels that the adapted piece is noteworthy then it is acceptable, if not, then it is dross and cast out.

De Santis and Alicata quickly attacked Montesanti for his arbitrariness and accused him of failing to recognize one of accomplishments of the modern aesthetic consciousness, the unity of the arts. They stated "La poesia è il prodotto d'una ispirazione creativa, superiore ad ogni pratica distinzione di generi" (20). They reiterated that since Italian cinema has always been tied to literature, why not elevate that relationship from one of lower-middle class, mediocrity to the greatest narrative tradition in modern times, i.e. the verismo of the nineteenth

century.

They essentially proposed that regardless of the medium, poetry is poetry and art is art. They make narration the equivalent of realism, it being the only way to achieve realism, that is narration as defined as that most basic human attribute, telling a story. That is to say that "un racconto, se è effettivamente un racconto, non può che essere letterario, cioè poetico, qualunque mezzo si usi per narrarlo" (Asor Rosa 85).

This early critical debate did much to shape neorealist film. The group of young cinema students and directors who were involved with *Cinema* and the Centro Sperimentale eventually became the new face of Italian cinema in the postwar period. The Centro Sperimentale was the most influential Italian cinematic organization at the time. It had the backing of the fascist state, and *Cinema* was widely read amongst the Cineguf clubs and other smaller cinematic organizations. Notable students from the period include Michelangelo Antonioni, Giuseppe De Santis, Pietro Germi, and Dino De Laurentiis. The debate on the future of cinema hinged entirely on the modes of narration that would be employed, and De Santis's and Alicata's successful defense of a return to nineteenth-century realist narrative models redirected the trajectory of Italian cinema.

As evidence of this new direction, shortly after the debate, Luchino

Visconti began filming *Ossessione*, which many critics recognize as the first neorealist film and the rebirth of Italian cinema which had lagged behind other national cinemas since its heyday during the silent era. Originally Visconti had planned on adapting Verga's novella "L'amante di Gramigna," but fascist authorities nixed the plan because it dealt with bandits and did not portray Italian society in a positive light. So instead, Visconti chose James Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. De Santis, Alicata, and several others associated with *Cinema* formed the nucleus of screenwriters that Visconti chose to collaborate on the project. Once again the fascist censors stepped in and their interdiction delayed its release until after the war. The decision to place Verga and *verismo* as the narrative model par excellence for a new national cinema and at the head of the nascent neorealist movement causes one to wonder what relationship, if any do the veristic models and poetics have with the cinematic and literary tendencies of Cesare Zavattini, who would later become the face of the movement?

Zavattini Letterario

Zavattini came to the cinema only after a successful career as a writer. Therefore, it follows that in order to understand his theoretical positions

regarding cinema, we must understand their relationship to his literary works. As Luigi Malerba stated, "lo Zavattini che c'è dietro [il cinema] è sempre lo stesso dei suoi racconti, facilmente riconoscibile, beninteso con tutte le sfaccettature, it tic, le luci, i fumi del suo temperamento" (quoted in Zavattini, *Opere* xii). Malerba is not alone in this notion, as other critics have discussed the unitary nature of Zavattini's poetics (Jandelli 9). Zavattini's polyhedric nature as a journalist, screenwriter, poet painer and theoretician invite, even require an analysis of all aspects of his career, from the beginning.

Early in his career, Zavattini was heralded as an up-and-coming writer of the new generation. His first novel, *Parliamo tanto di me* received rave reviews in all the major literary journals. In his review entitled "Oggi, 'great attraction'" Elio Vittorini had the following to say about the young author:

> C'è in giro un libretto di 120 paginette dal titolo strano (*Parliamo tanto di me*) dal prezzo risorio (cinque lire) dall'autore fino a ieri ignoto (Cesare Zavattini) e tutta Italia gli sta correndo dietro facendolo salire a tirature favolose; le terze pagine si azzuffano a chi ne parla prima e il via fu dato, incredibile, dal più fine dei nostri scrittori politici, Telesio Interlandi, in un articolo di fondo del *Tevere*: torinesi, milanesi, genovesi, romani, napoletani, pugliesi, hanno ormai, per merito dei rispettivi quotidiani, la loro giusta opinione in prosposito; a Firenze siamo i primi a parlarne. Ma cosa cantano le terze pagine? Cantano alla nascita di un novello umorista. (4)

While Vittorini's exuberance might be seen as an exaggeration, the reality is that Cesare Zavattini's name did indeed show up on the third page of many

publications and his name was thrown about with all of the cultural debates of the time. The book went through four reprintings in as many months and in 1932 Zavattini received an award from the Accademia d'Italia (Angioletti 50). As Zavattini's popularity continued to grow so did the problems that critics had in approaching his work. From the start there were a great variety of opinions as to where to collocate the young author and his original avant-garde work. Some critics classified him as a humorist, others as a surrealist or a *crepuscolare*, and yet others simply judged him as a talented modern European writer.

The positive response to *Parliamo tanto di me* secured him a job as an editor of several different bi-weekly literary magazines published by Rizzoli and Mondadori as well as Bompiani (*Almanacco letterario*). Later, in 1937, when his second book *I poveri sono matti* was published, his name was more widely known. He had published many short stories, and he had begun to collaborate in many of the major literary journals and magazines, yet still the critics were unable to deal with his style, subject matter, or the thematics he employed. The traditional methods of dealing with contemporary authors did not match up well with Zavattini's poetics. His subsequent works (*Totò il buono*, *Io sono il diavolo*) did little to resolve their difficulties in categorization. Some wanted to place him in the crepuscular tradition, others with the surrealists, others completely avoided the topic by calling him a "modern writer." His status as a humorist was also

debated. Literary critics finally found relief from the "caso Zavattini" in the mid-to-late forties as Zavattini dedicated himself more fully to the cinema and the newly-coined term Neorealism caught on. Since then, Zavattini has been seen as a man of cinema and his literary origins are by and large forgotten, prompting him to state on one occasion, "Io sono più famoso che letto" (*Opere* xii).

As a whole, Zavattini's literary works provide us with important information regarding his poetics and their application to the cinema. Most of these facets are easily recognized from the outset of his career as a writer, namely his tendency to recycle his own and others' stories, the humble nature of his characters, and the fragmented narrative style that punctuates his entire career.

Zavattini had a penchant to recycle, not only his own works, but prominent works within the Italian literary tradition. His first book, *Parliamo tanto di me* was essentially an appropriation of Dante's *Commedia* into modern terms. The nameless protagonist takes a guided tour of the afterlife with a spirit that felt a certain affinity with him.[3]

This trend to adapt and appropriate continued into his later literary career, albeit in a much more subdued tone. Works like *Io sono il diavolo* and *Totò*

[3] The two travel to Hell and see the sinners that reside there. Liars are larvae, the gluttonous are forced to watch devils eat all manner of exquisite food, thieves are forced to break unbreakable safes, and the vain speak words to the wind, but cannot hear themselves talk. Purgatory is an immense field covered with daisies and the souls who end up there are forced to stay as a formality, without punishment or penance until they will later ascend into Paradise where they will find utter boredom with those who await their arrival.

il buono both draw from Zavattini's earlier writings and show a distinct pattern of appropriating and recycling of material.[4] On many occasions Zavattini relied on his literary roots for ideas that he could refine, manipulate, and recreate into new, fresh and vibrant stories. His inclination to recycle and refine underlies his entire career, cinematic and literary. His strength was his ability to take a small story from elsewhere and tailor it to find its new place in the larger narrative.

At the center of all of Zavattini's works lies a first-person narrator who is responsible for collecting and narrating all of the troubles of living, both his and the other characters'. His central characters all originate from the middle and lower classes of society, clerks, factory workers, typographists, schoolteachers, housewives, thieves, gravediggers, and various jobless dole seekers. There is always an authority figure, be it a boss or a factory owner, who is despised, envied, or hated by those below him. Zavattini's world is a world of the downtrodden who are in eternal conflict with society and with themselves. They aren't members of unions, they don't strike. Even in his literature, the themes of poverty, social injustice, hunger, misery, old age, death, and melancholy work their way to the forefront. In *Parliamo tanto di me* the narrator and his guide stop before three spirits who, as his guide explains to him, are poor men.

Sostammo un momento davanti a tre spiriti che ragionavano

[4]An analysis of *Totò il buono,* its origins and various permutations can be found in Chapter 2.

> pacatamente tra loro. "Sono tre poveri", mi spiegò la guida, "sempre insieme, e ripetono dall'alba al tramonto le stesse cose." Per timidezza non chiesi come mai tre poveri si trovassero all'inferno.
> Diceva l'uno:
> "Domani parto per l'America. Mi sono informato dove abita il signor Morgan, l'uomo più ricco del mondo. Gli dirò: sono il capo di una famiglia numerosa e disgraziata; ho tanti figli, moglie, fratelli, la vecchia madre e due cugini poveri. Cos'è per lei un milione, magari mezzo milione? Ah, non di dollari, si capisce. . . con il cambio verrebbe a darmi non più di cento mila dollari. Se vuole, li guadagna in un'ora. E pensi a che felicità per la mia famiglia, quando arriverò a casa con un milione. Non li vede? Pianti, abbracci, capriole, grida. Guardi, contando certi altri parenti bisognosi saremo una quarantina a esserle riconoscenti per tutta la vita. Le scriveremo spesso, e ai miei bambini insegnerò a pregare ogni sera per il signor Morgan. (*Opere* 32)

Zavattini's characters, despite the injustice of being sent to Hell simply because they were poor, understand first of all that solidarity amongst themselves is essential in order to avoid being duped by the guardian devils that in the afterlife everyone is equal, or even worse, that being poor is better than being rich; and that they shouldn't hope to ever change their status. Instead, Zavattini's poor can't help but dream and hope of a better situation, even in the afterlife.

Amidst this crush of depressing characters and themes, the narrator always finds a way to recognize the irony of the situation and to draw out those elements in a way that brings a smile to the reader's face. Zavattini's characters, as desperate and downtrodden as they may be, are prone to react to their demoralized state with irreverent, puerile acts, childish pranks, and disrespectful

tricks. They have strange, foreign, and often monosyllabic names; Bat, Tab, Nin Rok, Morgan are just a few of his characters. Their stories are anecdotal, absurd and nonsensical. There is no attempt to be objective, much less portray reality. Yet through the absurdity a strong sense of humanity shines through. This is the basis of Zavattini's realist poetics – a humanist approach to reality.

Zavattini delighted in the fragment. His books are all episodic and very few carry the narrative structures that were so prominent in Italian literature during the fascist period. Zavattini was able to express himself through brief flashes of stories and anecdotes, thus avoiding the weighty narrative architectures of his contemporaries. An example of this comes in one of his early writings:

> Cinquanta righe! Quande cose io posso fare in questo spazio, è la vera felicità [. . .] io sono commosso, io sono troppo contento, e prendo una parola, una sola, "aceto", e la prendo delicatamente come una tortora, la metto in mezzo alla bianca colonna e sto lì a contemplarla estatico, mentre cantano le cicale, in attesa del mercoledì venturo.

Time for Zavattini is limitless. His literary works are oblivious to the standard concept of time and space. Often his stories get lost in nonsensical psychological meanderings of his protagonists. By having his protagonists recount and act in brief and at times impalpable and absurd stories, Zavattini was able to avoid the cumbersome and traditional narrative structures that surrounded contemporary Italian approaches to the novel. His reasons for pursuing this atypical format

reside in his intense dislike for veristic models. In an interview some time later Zavattini stated:

> Per organizzarli, mi ci voleva una struttura di racconto elementare, pretestuosa, dilatabile, itinerante, onnicomprensiva: così ho scelto lo schema più noto; quello dantesco del viaggio nell'aldilà, Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso, guidato da uno spirito interlocutore del protagonista. Avevo una repulsione per il racconto veristico. Detestavo il romanzo. Il linguaggio corrente lo accettavo soltanto quando mi sentivo capace di ripristinarlo. (*Parliamo tanto di me* vi)

His literary practices clearly put him at odds with veristic poetics. About the only comparison that can really be drawn between his literature and that of Verga is that both privileged poor, lower class protagonists. Beyond that there are few similarities. His fragmented narrative style caused his critics great consternation and difficulty in interpreting his works. The fragment has a long history in Italian literary culture as it is found in the very strong and very ancient novella tradition. As will be seen in a future chapter, the novella, or short story proved to be an important field for Zavattini, as it pertains to his role in the development of episode cinema.

The irony of Zavattini's repulsion with Verismo is that the veristic model played a major part in the rebirth of Italian cinema in the 1940s, as a debate over the role of literature in cinema would form the first steps towards the Neorealist movement. However, the divergent nature of his literary poetics with respect to those of Verga did not prevent him from borrowing from the model proposed by

his contemporaries when it suited his needs. Although it would be naive to suggest that Zavattini's cinematic theories are simply those of Verga transposed into a contemporary context within a new signification system, there are parallels that merit analysis.

Zavattini Teorico

Through the years, Zavattini produced a massive amount of critical articles, interviews, and statements that reflected his views of cinema and helped define the neorealist movement. Influential as these writings were, he never considered them to be theories in any formal or systematic sense of the word. Rather, he viewed them to be "pensieri di un uomo che si sforza di capire le ragioni di quello che i cineasti italianni hanno fatto e possono fare" (*Cinema* 745). Such a statement is difficult to accept because throughout his critical works, and even in his screenplays, a systematic approach to the role of cinema in society, the method for creating and producing cinematic works are clearly delineated in a formal manner, such that his theoretical works have been gathered, published, analyzed and codified these theories[5]. Not surprisingly, the anglophone world is largely unaware of Zavattini's critical writings on cinema. Aside from a few

[5]Guglielmo Moneti, ed. *Lessico zavattiniano:parole e idee su cinema e dintorni*. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992.)

translated articles, no anthologies or extensive translations, critical or otherwise are in existence. These theories are important, not only in comprehending the underpinnings of Zavattini's (and by default De Sica's) cinematic career, but also to understanding the debates surrounding Neorealism, both its origins and its demise.

To say that *Verismo*, as articulated by Giovanni Verga, forms the foundation for Zavattini's cinematic theories would be rash and naive, even though superficially the two appear to be working towards the same goal, with a similar instrumentation. On the other hand, to deny any connection beyond the superficial would be equally rash and naive. Perhaps a middle ground that accepts and analyzes the overlapping areas and similarities, yet recognizes their differences, is needed.

One clear connection between the two can be seen in their choices of characters. For Verga, this meant that the central characters were those who had not traditionally been represented (at least prior to Manzoni), the poor and downtrodden of society. In Zavattini's realm, the character had a double meaning, not only was it in reference to the characters (fictitious or otherwise) that would act as agents within the narrative, but it also referred to the actors that portrayed those characters. Zavattini, like Verga, wanted to see a different type of character, one that was closer to a real person. Heroes, in the traditional

sense, were not welcome:

> Di eroi più o meno immaginari ho piene le scatole; io voglio incontrare quello che è il vero protagonista della vita oggi. [. . . . . .] Siamo tutti dei personaggi. Gli eroi creano complessi di inferiorità negli spettatori. È arrivata l'ora di dire agli spettatori che sono loro i veri protagonisti della vita. (*Cinema* 730-31)

This attack on heroes and their roles is a recurring theme throughout his career. On numerous occasions he discussed the necessity of bringing characters down to reality so that spectators could understand that:

> Nel romanzo i protagonisti erano *eroi*; la scarpa dell'eroe era una scarpa speciale. Noi invece cerchiamo di cogliere il punto comune dei nostri personaggi. Nella scarpa mia, nella sua, in quella del ricco, in quella dell'operaio troviamo gli stessi ingredienti, la stessa fatica dell'uomo. (*Cinema* 744)

The search for common ground between spectator and spectacle sought a non-differentiation between the two. Often this led to anti-heroes as protagonists, which should not be surprising, given the plethora of similar characters Zavattini wrote about throughout the Thirties. Furthermore, that he should disdain heroes and heroism should be seen as a foregone conclusion when one considers that much of fascist rhetoric was based upon the cult of personality and the mythicization of heroes and heroic events[6]. In short, " . . . perché dobbiamo spargere lacrime sopra Antonia Marianni, personaggio fittizio, quando a pochi

[6]Umberto Eco discusses the role of the hero in fascist thought and ideology in his 1995 article "Eternal Fascism: Fourteen Ways of Looking at a Blackshirt." *New York Review of Books* 42:11, June 22, 1995: 12-15.

metri da noi c'è, mettiamo, Carlo, il figlio di Caterina Rigoglioso, il quale esige che ci si occupi veramente di lui" (*Cinema* 708)? For Zavattini, there was something disturbing about the emphasis on the fictitious characters that had populated Italian narrative up to that point. The customary means of representation had become, in Zavattini's mind, "un modo di evadere quando lo sforzo contemporaneo è quello di non evadere" (Cinema 711).

The amalgamation of spectator and spectacle was, in Zavattini's realm, a necessary step towards a truthful representation of reality. In Zavattinian terms, the character had a double meaning, not only was it in referece to the agents (fictitious or otherwise) that would act within the narrative, but it also referred to the actors who portrayed those characters. Through the proposed merger of life with art, it becomes evident that:

> nel neorealismo anche l'attore, inteso come colui che presta fittiziamente la propria carne ad altri, non ha più ragione di esistere, allo stesso modo del soggetto immaginato. Il neorealismo – come lo intendo io – richiede che ognuno sia attore di se stesso. Voler far recitare un uomo al posto di un altro implica una storia prepensata. E il nostro sforzo è di mostrare cose viste, non favole. (*Cinema* 733)

The notion of having people act out their own story before the camera, either after the fact, or even better, in real time became known as the *film lampo*.

The *film lampo* was essentially a film that was made in a few weeks' time, with little to no crew (amateurs could apply), costing little and thereby avoiding

the conventional laws of capital that apply with commercial cinema. Those who participate in the film as actors are either reenacting an event from their real life, or they are recording an event as it happens. Zavattini preferred the second of the two as it allowed for a more spontaneous and immediate representation of reality. Zavattini felt strongly that through these types of cinematic encounters new cultural narratives in the format of a film would be created, even that cinema would supercede all other narrative means and that it would become the new pen and paper for the modern world:

> . . . vorrei che fossimo chiamati spesso a collaborare alla ricostruzione di uno dei tanti fatti cui poco o molto partecipiamo quotidianamente, o che non protestassimo se qualcuno sempre in agguato ci vuole mettere una pellicola; c'è qualcosa di religioso in questo contributo dato da tutti per capire meglio, per fare capire la geografia di un gesto, per penetrare perciò, anche in questa maniera, il senso della nostra "solita" vita. (*Cinema* 709)

The reenactment of an historical event in front of the camera is nothing new, particularly in Italian cinema, which is well known for its historical dramas. Zavattini's call for reenactment cinema is a far cry from the grandiose historical dramas of the silent era, or the more recent fascist spectacles glorifying ancient Rome. Rather, Zavattini's proposal is an opportunity to reflect on past actions, a moment of recall wherein the filmmaker (ideally the producer, screenwriter, director, and actor are all the same person) can analyze the event in its entirety and place it in a meaningful context for the audience. Zavattini only had one

opportunity to follow through with a cinematic reenactment of this kind – Caterina Rigoglioso in *Amore in città*.

An omnibus film that was a collaboration between several different directors, *Amore in città* was a unique film that stretched the limits of neorealism.[7] The episode in question, "Love of a Mother" recounts the story of Caterina Rigoglioso, a young Sicilian girl who, upon relocating to Rome for work as a domestic, found herself pregnant. She was unable to work and take care of her child and she could not return to her family in Sicily for the shame she would have brought upon them. She decided that her only option was to abandon the child. The press decried the act, which caused her to changer her mind and reclaim her son from the orphanage that had taken him in. She was able to find work at the orphanage, take care of her child and take care of other children as well. The story drew national attention and many were moved by her dire circumstances. Zavattini learned of the story and approached Rigoglioso about reenacting her story for *Amore in città*, which she accepted.

Using Caterina to act out her own life proved to be more of a challenge than perhaps Zavattini and Maselli had anticipated. Zavattinian projects had employed non professional actors before (most notably in *Ladri di biciclette*), but that was under the expert direction of Vittorio de Sica, who was able to identify

[7] *Amore in città* as a cinematic whole is analyzed more fully in Chapter 3, as it is one of the earliest manifestations of episode cinema.

talent and bring out qualities that perhaps no other director was able to[8]. Caterina's performance in the film was less than memorable. Maselli tried to compensate for her inability to act and express emotion on camera with shots that emphasized the melodramatic, thus inducing the spectator to feel compassion for her plight. The strained cinematography and the lack of quality acting combine to make the episode a failure in cinematic terms, yet in Zavattinian terms it was a great success.

As was noted, the purpose of the *film lampo* was not to produce a cinematic masterpiece, but to produce something that would cause at least those involved with the project, if not the audience, to reflect on the event and to be able to take some sort of moral teaching from it. This sense of moral didacticism is a key element to the *film lampo* and to Caterina's reenactment in *Amore in città*. Caterina's story was to be a moral tale that would allow the protagonist to relive and morally remake the events selected. The religious nature of the *film lampo* creates an almost expiatory cinematic experience, for the audience, as well as the actors. Indeed there is a liturgical sense that permeates the Caterina Rigoglioso episode. The story itself is one of redemption and penance and resembles a medieval morality play, both in content and structure. As Margulies, has noted

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[8]It is interesting to note that Enzo Staiola and Lamberto Maggiorani both reached the apex of their acting career while working with De Sica on *Ladri di biciclette*. The only non professional actor employed by De Sica to actually achieve a measure of success was Franco Interlenghi, who played Pasquale in *Sciuscià*.

the "reenactment becomes a ritualized plea for the redemptive potential of the film medium" (224). Everything that happens in the world is worth narrating through cinematic means, regardless of its banality because everything that is real becomes sacred. Participation in the moral and ethical analysis of reality through cinematic means assumes a sacred function. Reality, in a raw, unmediated form (or at least as unmediated as possible), has a suggestive and communicative force. Zavattini employed the *film lampo* to harness that force as a means to change the world, to redeem it. To improve the knowledge and understanding of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, etc. through direct contact would have such a powerful effect upon the spectator that they couldn't help but desire and work for change.

Closely aligned with the *film lampo* is the *film inchiesta*. "Inchiesta" is an interesting term for Zavattini, as the term denotes an inquiry, or better, investigation in order to discover reality more fully, with all of its complexity. This technique of investigation closely relates to the scrupulous documentation that the Italian *veristi* and the French naturalists amassed in preparation for the next stage of their artistic creations – giving order to the notes and creating a document that would truly represent humanity and reality. As Mino Argentieri notes, an analogous method of preparing for a film shoot developed in Italy with the advent of Neorealism in the postwar period (*Lessico Zavattiniano* 104). Many

directors and screenwriters took copious notes, held countless interviews and spent endless hours finding sites to film. He also notes: "che sia stato Zavattini a introdurre in Italia un metodo, divenuto poi regolamentare, forse non è esatto, mentre risponde a verità che Zavattini ne è stato l'assertore e il teorico più tenace" (*Lessico Zavattiniano* 104). Zavattini was notorious for his preparatory work with all of his projects. An entire archive could be filled with photographs of him with his notebook in hand as he interviewed, observed and analyzed the world around him.

For Zavattini *inchiesta* was more than just collecting data that would then later be reorganized to narrate an event or story. The process of gathering the information itself was equally, if not more important. The *inchiesta* was in no way limited to pre-production material. If carried out properly it would become a *film inchiesta*, the sole purpose of which would be to make known the ontological status of the investigated subject. The *inchiesta* is not just an instrument to capture a narrative event, it is the embodiment of the human spirit's desire for knowledge.

> Il neorealismo non può partire da contenuti prestabiliti, bensì da una posizione morale: la *conoscenza* del proprio tempo con i mezzi specifici del cinema. È nostra comune preoccupazione cercare di sapere come stanno le cose intorno a noi; e non sembri questa una banalità: a molti la verità non interessa, o quanto meno non hanno interesse a farla conoscere; poiché conoscere vuol dire provvedere [. . . . .] lo *spirito d'inchiesta* non sarà una livellazione dei modi di espressione. A proposito di questo *spirito d'inchiesta* mi meraviglia

> che si debba spiegare che in esso si articolano tutte le possibilità creative dello spirito umano. (*Cinema* 742-43)

A witty maxim best describes the formula for creating a *film inchiesta*: "il minimo di invenzione e il massimo di registrazione" (*Cinema* 744). It becomes, therefore, a cognitive means to understand reality. Its function is to fuse life and art together as a means of knowledge and cognizance.

Another term that plays a central role in Zavattini's concept of cinema is *pedinamento*. Literally meaning "to shadow, to tail, or to follow," *pedinamento* was also referred to as *buco nel muro* (hole in the wall) *coinquilino* (co-tenant), and *luogo del delitto* (crime scene). Each term has its own nuances, but the metaphor is clear, an attitude of observation at an anthropological level is a principal means of understanding a subject or event and successfully analyzing it. In order to understand these aspects of Zavattini's theories we must understand several of his presuppositions. Zavattini begins with the presumption that "non c'è un giorno, un'ora, un minuto, di un essere umano che non sia degno di essere comunicato agli altri, purché questa comunicazione derivi dal bisogno di testimoniare la propria presenza solidale nella giornata nostra e degli altri" (*Cinema* 703). Second, cinema must be an encounter with reality. The artist "non deve partire dall'arte ma dalla vita" (*Cinema* 744). Filmmakers are not to stay in their studios and hypothesize about reality, they must go out and meet it. This is their moral obligation to their art and to the world. Third, they must

search for stories and narratives in daily reality with the understanding that "non c'è un giorno, un'ora, un minuto, di un essere umano che non sia degno di essere comunicato agli altri, purché questa comunicazione derivi dal bisogno di testimoniare la propria presenza solidale nella giornata nostra e degli altri" (*Cinema* 703). In the same line of thought it is essential that filmmakers learn to "scegliere quei fatti che si svolgono sotto i nostri occhi, e seguirli, pedinarli con la fede paziente di chi sa che ogni punto e ogni momento dello spazio e del tempo dell'uomo sono importanti e narrabili" (*Cinema* 703). This image of stalking reality is at the heart of Zavattini's thoughts on cinema; that every aspect of every life was worthy of analysis and that artists should base their work on an understanding (arrived at through experience and encounters, not through abstract thought and speculation) of the world that surrounds them. This type of art would create a new relationship between the artist and the subject, a relationship that "non solo modifichi la nostra vita, ma che produca i suoi effetti sulla vita, sì da realizzare una più alta convivenza tra gli uomini" (as cited in *Lessico Zavattiniano* 40-41). *Pedinamento*, *buco nel muro*, etc. were not just an instrumentation to capture reality, they were a conceived as agents of change, changing the way humans interact with each other, the way commercial interests interact with society, and a mutation of the relationship between artist and art. Underlying this change, however, was the dire need to "mangiare la realtà stessa

completamente" (*Cinema* 706).

A fine example of "devouring reality" that is found in his work with De Sica on *Il tetto*. The entire film is based upon a young couple, Natale and Luisa Zambon, who needed to find a house before their child was born. The couple lived with Natale's parents, not too far from Zavattini. Natale was a bricklayer, Luisa a maid and the two shared a bedroom with his parents. They had been looking, unsuccessfully, for a room to rent and after exhausting their resources (and even considering moving to the shanty town areas that were a popular choice for many workers) they eventually ended up moving to Ostia because that was the only place they could afford. Zavattini was friends with the couple in the early 50's and even was the godfather to their first child. He thought that their story would be a good application of the neorealist theories he had been articulating. He slightly modified their story and the couple in his screenplay followed through with the option of building a small dwelling in one of the shanty towns.

The project was first presented to Rossellini, who turned it down. Zavattini then approached De Sica, who accepted wholeheartedly. The two wanted to use the film as a means of unifying the neorealist movement, which at the time was undergoing serious crises as the movement fractured with the 1954 releases of Visconti's *Senso* and Fellini's *La strada*. Funding caused delays in the

production. Eventually, De Sica decided to fund it entirely himself, which was common for many of the films he made with Zavattini. However, he postponed production once again because in order to secure the funds he had to act in other directors' films. When De Sica had enough capital to actually begin, they went through an abnormally long pre-production phase (four months just to decide the location, and over a year and a half for the screenplay). Filming finally began in the fall of 1955 and after several interruptions, while De Sica acted in another film, filming was completed in April of 1956.

Although intended as a means of healing a fractured movement, *Il tetto* was too late to do much to change the diverging directions of the various factions within the neorealist movement. Chronologically it is one of the last neorealist films, and it did little to energize or bring support to the movement. The film was released a week before the Hungarian Revolution in October of 1956 and never did escape from its shadow. Combine the highly charged political and cultural arena in Postwar Italy with the fact that the political leanings of the neorealist movement were inextricably connected to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and it is clear to see why De Sica and Zavattini spent more time defending the film than promoting it. Ever since *Umberto D.*, the Christian Democrats had labeled all artistic endeavors that directly engaged with social themes as communist propaganda and as a result critics either treated it with the vitriol

common to attacks on neorealism as a whole or apathetic indifference to a movement that had run its course. Had it been made several years earlier it might have had its intended effect but as it was released late in 1956, the winds of change had already eroded the base of the movement.

Notwithstanding its inauspicious release and the lack of interest, the film was stylistically as important as were *Sciuscià*, *Ladri di biciclette*, and *Umberto D.*. Unlike those films, which were all fictional stories based in real, lifelike circumstances, *Il tetto* was based on actual events. Zavattini chose to expand the story to a more universal theme (the lack of affordable housing) and some changes to the resolution of the problem were made. Rather than have the real life Luisa and Natale reenact their story for the camera as occurred in the Rigoglioso episode of *Amore in città*, a national search was held to cast the parts of the lead protagonists and their family members. Though not ideal and somewhat contradictory to Zavattini's stance on the role of actors, these concessions should be seen as pragmatic adjustments. By the time principal photography began, five or more years had passed since Luisa and Natale were in their predicament. They had aged and were not interested in participating in the project in such a direct manner. In short, the choice to work with non-professional actors, rather than the original protagonists of the story, does not degrade the message of the film, nor does it compromise the principles that

Zavattini had relentlessly advocated.

Shortly after its release a volume was published that chronicled the pre-production, the making of the film, and an official screenplay.[9] Though common for many films, and not the first Zavattini-De Sica collaboration to have its screenplay and other materials relative to the film published, the documentary nature of the volume is an important record of the method of production the duo employed for the film. Michele Gandin, the editor of the volume, keenly observes: "Chiunque abbia la pazienza di leggere con sufficiente attenzione il materiale da noi raccolto, si accorgerà che il processo creativo de 'Il tetto' corrisponde esattamente a quello enunciato da Zavattini in sede teorica" (17). While somewhat exuberant in extolling the film as the embodiment of Zavattini's theories (even Zavattini wouldn't have gone that far) he does have a point. Given the expectations of what cinema was supposed to be and how it was supposed to be created during the 1950s, *Il tetto* did embody many of Zavattini's ideas. It stretched the limits of what was expected of cinema and it expanded the horizons of an unfortunately moribund movement.

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[9]Michele Gandin, ed. *Il tetto di Vittorio De Sica* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1956). The volume was a part of a series wherein Cappelli published similar material for the films of certain directors. Many of the films selected are considered among the most important of the Italian cinematic canon.

The Debate with Aristarco

Zavattini was the foremost advocate of neorealism as a means of using cinema to reduce the space between life and art. His theories, however, did not go unchallenged. In the early Fifties there was a great debate over the future of Italian cinema and the role of realism in it. The primary figures involved in the debate included Luigi Chiarini, Umberto Barbaro, and Guido Aristarco. Of these, Aristarco is perhaps the most relevant to the discussion here as he represented the polar opposite to Zavattini's theories. However, it is important to note that Chiarini and Barbaro were both heavily involved in the realist discussions that took place at the Centro Sperimentale during the latter part of the Fascist period. Chiarini was the director and Barbaro was on the faculty. Their positions in the postwar period are very similar, and both provide a middle option wherein cinematic realism can include actual facts or facts created. Their models allowed for a flexible approach to realism and were more concerned about presenting realistic images.

Aristarco was the editor of *Cinema nuovo*, a Marxist film journal that provided the forum for the debate. He was solidly grounded in the Lukácsian dogma of Marxist realism where an unmediated record of mundane facts was a flawed representation of reality. Instead, the filmmaker was to create detailed reconstructions of the past (preferably using Nineteenth Century historical

novels) that would denounce a certain situation, class, or historical moment, and treat it with a critical eye. Simply observing and reporting facts was insufficient. In order to have a complete portrait of reality, facts must be "paired with an understanding of their causes and [the] recording of events is supplemented by the perception of their underlying logic" (Casetti 27). This is not to say that Zavattini's version of realism is not realism, but a different "grade" of realism, an objective realism as opposed to the critical form of realism provided in the Lukácsian model. For Aristarco, the formal use of plot and character allows the filmmaker to create a an exemplary discourse through which a clearer conception of the events represented can be had. Through the intervention of the filmmaker, events are not merely descriptive, but can be understood within a broader frame of universality that will reveal the dynamic causes of social change. Aristarco dismissed Zavattini's projects as a form of Naturalism, which under Lukácsian realism had little value and could offer nothing beyond the details of the actual person, situation, or event being observed. The superficiality of shadowing reality lacked the critical elements of becoming revolutionary art.

The debate reached its peak in 1955 with the recent release of Visconti's *Senso*. Aristarco's review proclaimed that *Senso* was a bridge from neorealism to realism, that its artistic merit was analogous to Shakespeare and Goldoni and that its success at the box office could be a sign that Visconti's cinema would

bring radical revolution to the Italian populace.

Zavattini recognized the futility of carrying on the debate as he had few supporters. Aristarco and *Cinema nuovo* were at the height of their political power within the PCI and would dictate the direction of leftist cinema for the rest of the decade. Zavattini did fire off a final salvo stating that:

> La storicità del presente, chiamiamola così, si manifestava in una tale forma potente che non si poteva non parteciparvi e per questo ci si buttava dentro con una volontà anzi voluttà di partecipazione che era il nuovo manifestarsi dell'italiano. Si divideva il passato dal presente: il passato era stato tragico perché aveva fallito allora proprio come presente, e pertanto tra un'opera che pur con spirito attuale raccontasse un'antica storia, si doveva preferire sempre un'opera che con spirito presente esaminasse il presente poiché questo voleva dire un modo certo, politico, di influenzare il presente. [. . .] Ecco perché fra i pensieri e i sentimenti sollevati come un gran vento dalla bomba atomica, quello che più incalza il neorealista è questo: affrontare il presente come fosse l'eterno, altrimenti possiamo giungere alla fine del nostro discorso quando è troppo tardi. (Aristarco 890-91)

For Zavattini, presenting history as a means to discuss contemporary issues was an imperfect way to bring about change. He felt that the reality of the present would do more good for society than a mediated, contrived analysis of a story situated in an historical context. This was his leitmotiv throughout his career, to confront contemporary social problems by presenting reality in its purest, most unmediated form.

Conclusion

The debate between Aristarco and Zavattini hastened the demise of the neorealist movement. Although in practice, their opposing aesthetic perspectives had large areas of overlap, more than either would have admitted. Both took extreme positions and were immovable in them. Zavattini's insistence that

> La caratteristica più importante e la più importante novità del neo-realismo mi sembra perciò che sia quella di essersi accorti che la necessità della storia non era altro che un modo inconscio di mascherare una nostra sconfitta umana e che l'immaginazione, così come era esercitata, non faceva altro che sovrapporre degli schemi morti a dei fatti sociali vivi. (*Opere cinema* 718)

has caused some critics to assert that he held an "antiliterary bias" (Marcus *Filmmaking* 5). We must not misunderstand this assertion as a belief that there should be no storyline, plot or narrative development. Rather, we must realize that the role of story had been misunderstood and misapplied with regards to film (and literature for that matter). He clarifies this by stating:

> Il cinema deve creare la "storia" (se ancora così si può chiamare) strada facendo. Al massimo il regista può dar vita e conoscenza a un fantasma che ha dentro di sé, ma non dovrebbe mai girare la storia di un altro. Il tentativo vero non è quello di inventare una storia che somigli alla realtà ma di raccontare la realtà come se fosse una storia. (*Opere cinema* 729)

Zavattini retained that old formulas would not be as effective at communicating the truths that reality has to offer. He sought new forms for approaching and analyzing reality. Many times he was successful in finding a new means of

narrating, other times he in fact did "film someone else's story." While somewhat contradictory, the gap between theory and practice should not be surprising considering the historical context in which Zavattini's cinematic career began and then later flourished. Under the fascist regime literary adaptations were taken from censor-friendly works and created in a formalist technique with highly structured plots and characters that in no way reflected the reality most Italians encountered daily. Carlo Lizzani summed up the intellectual climate of the era

> Ecco il pericolo: che questo cinema formalistico, questo cinema di attenzione alla realtà letteraria e non alla realtà del paese diventasse egemone e potesse coagulare intorno a sé un movimento di interesse di cineasti giovani come eravamo noi. Noi vedevamo come più degno di attenzione un approccio alla realtà, attraverso, sì, la letteratura, ma attraverso un tipo di letteratura come quella verghiana che ci sembrava portasse più vicini alle realtà tenute nascoste per oltre vent'anni dal regime. (Asor Rosa 103)

Zavattini's theories obviously rejected the mediated approach to reality that the *Cinema* group chose, but when we look at his theories and compare them with Verga's it's clear that there are similarities. Both sought to base their narratives on actual, observed events with little to no mediation by the author/director. Both made painstaking efforts to document speech patterns and other details pertaining to their narratives. Their narratives focused on the downcast and underprivileged of society, the poor, the old, and the young. Verga brought attention to the poverty and ignorance of rural Sicily. Zavattini sought to bring

attention to poverty, both economic and spiritual. The similarities do not prove that Zavattini was a cinematic verist who sought to do with cinematic means what Verga did with literature, but they do cause us to reevaluate Zavattini's relationship with literature. Brunetta, in an analysis of literature and cinema described Zavattini as one who "senza mai riuscire a passare dietro alla macchina da presa, Zavattini ha, per primo, inaugurato un nuovo rapporto tra letteratura e cinema, riuscendo a favorirne la stretta collaborazione ed integrazione" (*Letteretura e cinema* 75). His work as a screenwriter most certainly revolutionized cinema but even in those moments where he felt that his work was completely free of literary influences, it is clear, as will be seen, that he assisted in creating new means of adapting literary works and literary structures into cinematic terms.

Chapter 2

Le Storie di Altri: Select Adaptations from De Sica and Zavattini's Collaborations

Negotiating the Terms

In perhaps his most widely known exposition of neorealist principles, Cesare Zavattini explicitly stated "Un regista non deve mai girare una storia altrui"(*Cinema* 892). The irony of the statement shows the divergence in the theoretical Zavattini, who appeared to be decidedly against the use of literary sources and contrived plots as a means of creating cinema, and the practical Zavattini, who in his collaborations De Sica alone adapted seven literary works to the screen. Many of those works were the most successful and noteworthy films the tandem created, including: *I bambini ci guardano*, *Ladri di bicicletta*, *Miracolo a Milano*, *L'oro di Napoli*, and *La ciociara*. Needless to say, a significant portion of the De Sica-Zavattini team's oeuvre is based upon someone else's story, yet few of these films (generally only *La ciociara*) receive critical treatment as adapted works sui generis.

The body of criticism regarding cinematic adaptations is by no means overwhelming but there have been notable contributions throughout the years. Adaptive studies are by nature a hybrid form of study that is torn between the

specificities of each medium. Rarely (if ever) are critics able to reconcile the differences between the critical apparatus employed for both.

Traditionally, adaptive studies have revolved around "fidelity analysis", which is to analyze where the director got it right, and where the original story was betrayed. As Robert Stam so aptly stated:

> The language of criticism with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as *infidelity*, *betrayal*, *deformation*, *violation*, *vulgarization*, and *desecration*, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity. [. . .] When we say an adaptation has been "unfaithful" to the original, the term gives expression to the disappointment we feel when a film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source. ("Beyond Fidelity" 54)

Much of the critical work surrounding adaptations privileges the literary original over the cinematic version, and many of the most famous (or infamous) adaptations are known precisely because they "betrayed" the original or for some reason the director "just didn't get it right." This implies a superiority of literature over film as a narrative means, an assumption that the latecomer to the narrative art must make up ground.

In recent years better critical tools have come about as attention has been placed on the study of narrative and intertextuality. Most fruitful for the study of the manifold relationships a text may have with prior texts has been Gerard Genette's *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Though intended as a study

of intertextuality among literary works, the concept of an intertextual dialogism crosses all boundaries of media and genre. The term palimpsest is highly suggestive. It denotes "a written document, usually on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of erased writing still visible" (*Palimpsests* 4). This analogy of an original document that has been written over at least once creates a useful image of a multilayered work wherein the original and the rewrite are both present, thus allowing for different strata of both to give further meaning to the text. To examine a palimpsestuous text is to recognize these layers and seek to understand their respective functions towards the whole.

Genette builds on the models of intertextuality offered by Kristeva and Bakhtin and elaborates his own concepts and terminology which prove to be very useful in the analysis of cinematic adaptations. Instead of borrowing Kristeva's term of intertextuality Genette coins a new term – transtextuality, which is "all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts" (*Palimpsests* 1). He further elaborates with the creation of five different types of transtextuality: intertextuality, which is the "effective co-presence of two texts in the form of quotation, plagiarism, and allusion" (*Palimpsests* 2). Paratextuality is the relationship between the text and its paratext, which can include "titles, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces,

notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and man other kinds of secondary signals whether allographic or autographic" (*Palimpsests* 3). Metatextuality, the third category, can be defined as a commentary, or critical statement about another text, named or not (*Palimpsests* 4). Architextuality refers to the artist's willingness or refusal to allow the text to be categorized generically, particularly as regards its paratextual elements (*Palimpsests* 4). The final category is the most pertinent to the present study as it contains many subcategories that are useful for describing and analyzing adaptations and adaptive processes. Hypertextuality is defined as "any relationship uniting text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (*Palimpsests* 4). Genette discusses many different functions can take place under the umbrella of hypertextuality which are very fluid and, not surprisingly, interconnected. They are too numerous to list in detail here. However, several key terms that are used throughout this study include: transposition, reduction, concision, condensation, augmentation, proximization, and extension. The broadest and most commonly used category is transposition.

Transpositions have two main subsections. First, a formal transposition, that is the translation of a text into another language, wherein the translation

affects the meaning of the original text only by accident or unintended consequence (*Palimpsests* 214). All cinematic adaptations are by nature translations from one system of signification to another. However, most fit into the second subcategory, a thematic transposition where the transformation of meaning is manifestly, indeed, officially, part of the purpose" (*Palimpsests* 214).

Other subcategories of transposition, include what Genette classifies as a quantitative transformation where either a reduction (abridgement) of the text, or an augmentation (a stylistic or thematic extension) of it are employed in the production of a hypertext. Associated with the reduction is the act of concision which is to abridge the text without removing or suppressing any of its thematic elements, but rewrite it in a more concise style. It produces a new text which may or may not preserve a word of the original text (*Palimpsests* 236). Similar to the concision, but slightly different is the condensation, which is essentially a summary of another text, which in some cases can also be considered metatextual commentaries on the hypotext (*Palimpsests* 238). These two categories are useful for discussing cinematic treatments, which were so prevalently used during Zavattini's and De Sica's careers, as the cinematic treatment for an adapted film will invariably take on one of these forms.

Augmentations take on various forms, but their primary function is to extend the text, either thematically, stylistically, or both. An extension is an

augmentation by massive addition that keeps within the stylistic boundaries already set. It extends the action, adds details that were previously not part of the hypotext. The function of extension is common, as most adaptations take liberties of expanding the role of a character, the emotional impact of a certain scene, or a certain theme. The categories of reduction and augmentation are essential to analyzing the hypertextual relationship between film and literature as an adapted film will always be a reduction of thematic or stylistic elements, an augmentation of them, or both.

One final category that will prove useful in discussing De Sica and Zavattini's adaptations, is that of proximization. This specific function is one in where "the hypertext transposes the diegesis of its hypotext to bring it up to date and closer to its own audience (in temporal, geographic, or social terms)" (*Palimpsests* 269). An example would be the way in which the film *Clueless* transposes Jane Austen's *Emma* by bringing the action, characters, and plot closer to the target audience. Zavattini and De Sica always created films that were situated in contemporary Italy. The act of proximization figures into the analyses of many of their adaptations and plays an important role in interpreting them.

That a hypertext might fit into multiple categories is not uncommon. In each of the categories and subcategories proposed by Genette, the boundaries are not as precise as one would desire. Genette readily acknowledges that

> Reduction and amplification are not as separate as would appear [. . .] textual translation that cannot fall easily into either of those two categories [reduction and augmentation] generally result from their combination, according to the formula *addition* + *suppression* = *substitution* . . . The genesis or haphazard tribulations of a hypertextual work may also provide examples of an opposite movement resulting in a zero sum: *addition* + *suppression* . . ." (*Palimpsests* 269)

The task of the critic is to determine which descriptors best fit the hypertext's relationship to the hypotext, many times multiple categories will be used to describe the texts.

Under Genette's rubric of transtextuality , cinematic adaptations are hypertexts, taken from a literary source, which acts as a hypotext that has been transformed through the process of transposition, reduction, concision, augmentation, suppression, extension, etc. The proposed framework allows for a flexible methodology that avoids the traditionally negative trappings of a fidelity analysis, yet provides a means through which insightful analysis can be offered. The discussion moves away from wrong or right, faithful or betrayal, to one of transformation, transposition, and proximization as both narratives are viewed within the larger context of intertextual dialogism.

I bambini ci guardano

Zavattini and De Sica's first official collaboration, *I bambini ci guardano*,

was released in the fall of 1943. The two had upheld a clandestine collaboration on *Teresa venerdì* two years earlier. The film marked an important step in both Zavattini's and De Sica's careers, not only because it was their first recognized work together, but also because it was a paradigmatic shift, particularly for De Sica, from lighter comedies to a more dramatic and serious cinema. As De Sica would remember in later years: "So benissimo, e lo sapevo anche allora, che *I bambini ci guardano* era un compromesso fra la vecchia e la nuova formula. Fu comunque, per Zavattini e per me, una esperienza decisiva . . . " (Nuzzi, Iemma 61). The old formula likely refers to several different aspects of Italian culture from that period. First, the cinema in which he participated, both as actor and director in his earlier career, including also the cinema of that period that was marked by the release of numerous melodramas and comedies. Second, it makes reference to the love triangle which was particularly common to Italian bourgeois theater and cinema. *I bambini ci guardano* must be read as a bridge between De Sica's earlier career, both as an actor and a director, in the genre of melodramatic comedies and the type of realist cinema he would produce after World War II. In a sense, this is the essence of De Sica as an artist, who produced some of the most influential neorealist films and yet, for financial reasons, was constrained to act in and direct many commercial melodramas and comedies. This paradox is one that critics have noticed, some viewing De Sica as tainting

the validity of his neorealist works.[1] *I bambini ci guardano* provides a clear illustration of the dual nature of De Sica's career. The acknowledged compromise between realism and classical genre cinema (melodrama in particular) presents an opportunity to analyze adaptative practices and the fusion of melodrama with realism, both of which are important aspects of De Sica and Zavattini's collaborations. For the present analysis, we will discuss Cesare Giulio Viola's *Pricò*, the novel on which *I bambini ci guardano* is based, it's melodramatic structure and the ways in which De Sica and Zavattini adapted the text to emphasize certain aspects of the melodrama in the film. The analysis will serve as a means of understanding not only their use of melodrama in *I bambini ci guardano*, but also provide a means by which melodramatic elements in other De Sica/Zavattini collaborations can potentially be examined as well.

Viola's Pricò

Born in Taranto in 1886, Cesare Giulio Viola was a poet, novelist and playwright. He received a degree in law at La Sapienza in Rome and worked there most of his career. As an aspiring young author he participated in various

[1]Nearly all major critics have discussed the varied nature of De Sica's cinematic career. Some notable contributions include Brunetta's *Storia del cinema italiano dal 1945 agli anni ottanta,* (Roma: Editori Riuniti) 1982. as well as Lizzani's *Il cinema italiano dalle origini agli anni ottanta,* (Roma : Editori riuniti)1992.

literary salons and rubbed shoulders with Pirandello and D'Annunzio, both of whom figured into his artistic formation. His first novel, *Pricò*, was published first in serial form in *Nuova Antologia* (1923) and then the following year by Mondadori. The central protagonist is a child, whose age is never precisely determined, but seven or eight years old seems a likely age.

Pricò, the nickname of the young boy (a play on the word precocious) is the only child of an upper middle class family. His father works long hours in an office and his mother keeps occupied with dinner parties and other social engagements. The mother is having an affair with another man and one day decides to abandon her husband and child. Pricò's father is unable to take care of him by himself so he has him sent to his mother in the country. The arrangement is short lived and Pricò is sent back to his father, only to catch a deadly case of influenza en route. During the recovery Pricò's mother returns to visit and Pricò invites her to stay. Out of obligation to her son she stays and the family slowly returns to normal. Hopes are high as they take a trip to a resort on the sea, but then when Pricò's father leaves the two of them there alone to stay on a few more days, the mother slips back into the affair and then abruptly leaves them again as she and Pricò return home. The father, distraught at this second rejection, does everything in his power to convince his wife to return, but is unable to persuade her. It is decided that Pricò will be sent to a boarding school and shortly after his

arrival at the school, his father commits suicide. The novel ends with the mother and their former maid going to the school to inform him of the unfortunate event.

Though narrated in third person, the story is clearly told through Pricò's eyes, and it could be argued that the narrator is actually an older Pricò. Adults are almost always in the background or described through Pricò's point of view. Viola skillfully employs a very limited third person narration which leaves plenty of clues for an adult to pick up on, yet adeptly shows the world from a child's limited knowledge of it. It is a narration of inference as the reader (and Pricò) deduce the actions, motives, and psyche of the adults with little or no help from the adult characters.

At the time it was considered very uncustomary for an Italian author to produce a work intended for adults but having a child as the central protagonist. Viola's Pricò is uncustomary not only because the child is at the heart of the story, but also because he plays an important role in the various love triangles found in the story. The standard formula of he, she and threatening other becomes two distinct triangles as either the father or the lover enter the scene and Pricò remains at the center battling for the love and affection of his mother.

The novel is quite melodramatic, both in structure and in content. It follows a standard theatrical form with three clearly defined breaks in action that

can be interpreted as different acts. The first act ends with the sickness of Pricò and the second begins with the mother's temporary return and the hope that things will eventually work out. The final act is set in motion when they leave for the seaside resort. Each act is punctuated with a climactic end, be it the sickness of Pricò, the violent confrontation between Nina and her lover, and in the end, the father's suicide. The structure of each act also allows for emotional excess where Pricò's ups and downs are heightened by the uncontrollable decisions of the adults surrounding him. Tensions between his mother and her lover or his father cause great anxiety in the child as he tries to remain faithful to her in the hopes that she'll choose to stay at home permanently and fulfill her traditional role.

Pricò Adapted

The novel was chosen as De Sica's next project essentially because Zavattini appreciated "la qualità umana e poi cinematografica, un racconto semplice, diretto, elementare, un racconto di valore" (Iemma Nuzzi 58). A group of screenwriters was called together to create a screenplay from Cesare Giulio Viola's 1924 book *Pricò*. Zavattini remembered the moment some years later that "fu proposto un racconto da quell'amico fiorentino, Franci. Il racconto si

chiamava *Pricò* e ne traemmo *I bambini ci guardano*. Era forse la cosa più bella che avesse scritto Giulio Cesare Viola, che in altre sedi non era il mio autore" (Nuzzi, Iemma 58). The group consisted of Zavattini, De Sica, Adolfo Franci, Gherardo Gherardi, and Cesare Giulio Viola. Through De Sica's explicit endorsement, Zavattini quickly took control of the group and pushed the project through to its end.

In the adaptation of Viola's work, De Sica and Zavattini remain quite faithful to the original plot structure and, where possible, the narrative point of view. The differences are in general superficial, as the action remains the same and in some cases even the dialogue is directly lifted from the book. This should not be surprising as the present tense is the predominant means of narration, which causes the work to read as a screenplay, or a theatrical work. Viola was also very involved in the theater as a playwright, particularly when the book was written.

The film undergoes a quantitative transformation (as opposed to a qualitative transformation found in a thematic transposition) which can be seen as a sort of concision of the original. It is an abridgement of the original text that does not remove or suppress any of its thematic elements, but rewrites them in a more concise style. The concision becomes a new text which certain aspects of the melodrama of the original are devalued in the film to make way for realist

aspects, yet others are emphasized to maintain the tension that propels the characters to act according to the genre. What occurs is a form of concision of some areas and augmentation in others that create an efficient balance between the spirit of the novel and the needs of the camera.

Important concisions include the relationship between Pricò and Paolina, the girl assigned to watch over him while he stays with his grandmother. De Sica's rendition of this sections of the book is brief, but still offers a clear picture of the themes Viola brought out. The seamstress that visits Nina at home and serves as a go-between for Arturo (Roberto in the film) is fused into Zia Berelli (Nina's sister). Viola does not specify Berelli's occupation, just that Pricò goes there to play with his cousins and be watched by his aunt. De Sica alters the environment and places Pricò into an environment of young, sexually active women who make little effort to hide or reduce their sexuality from the young boy. Notable augmentations include the nosy gossip neighbor who has an uncanny ability to ring the bell whenever something goes wrong in the house. The gossip's entry during moments of crisis aid in creating a tension between the family and society. Andrea's co-workers and the first group of friends at the resort aid the narration by completing the social and cultural backdrop for the film. While the gossip adds melodramatic tension, the other characters mentioned allow space for the representation of reality, which is especially

poignant in the bocce players Andrea associates with at the resort, one of whom speaks constantly in dialect, which was frowned upon by fascist censors, and the other, an older professor who constantly reminds him to speak proper Italian. Ultimately the transformations that De Sica and Zavattini perform, both to the structure and the characters aid them in fusing the realistic elements that they would later become so well known for and the melodramatic, which had played a fundamental role in the development of Italian cinema.

Melodrama in *I bambini ci guardano*

Christopher Wagstaff offers an interesting means of evaluating genre as it relates to realist narrative. Essentially, individual films move vertically along what he terms a hierarchy of reference, where the upper levels are indexical of the surface, the concrete, the particular and the lower levels of the scale refer to less particular, more general, universal and cyclical experiences. A documentary would be situated in the upper levels as it refers directly to the historical reality of actual events and people, thus constituting the upper levels of the hierarchy of reference. Genre films that contain common repetitive human themes of life, death, the struggles between good and evil, the changes of the seasons etc would be situated in the lower levels. further down the. In short, the upper levels on

the scale are more referential to reality and history while the lower levels refer to more generic, collective elements of humanity (Wagstaff 58-9).

As can be guessed, realist narratives are classified within the upper levels of the hierarchy and generic narratives are situated in the lower, generic levels. However, it appears evident that ascribing one level of reference to a particular narrative (whether or not it aspires to present itself as such) proves to be difficult, if not impossible. That said, it is also evident that the way neorealist narratives have been defined by critics and even by their creators is through the emphasis of the superficial levels.

> By appearing, on the surface level, not to be making the conventional reference to the other, deeper narratives, neorealist stories appear to prioritize representations over genre. They are commonly described as refusing narrative and offering an alternative to genre cinema. The associations made between 'realist' narratives and non-fictional narratives can sometimes hang on an implausible assertion that they function on one single level of reference only. (Wagstaff 60-1)

This notion of realism is simply incompatible with what is actually present in neorealist narratives, whose referents often have been intended and are interpreted to be much deeper than the surface level of representation. These forays into deeper levels of reference place neorealist narratives in a category, wherein generic formulas (such as the "old" formula to which De Sica was referring when discussing the creation of *I bambini ci guardano*) are employed as a part of the narrative to give depth (and humanity) to the story. Common generic

categories that are characteristic of neorealist cinema include comedy and melodrama. Both are equally important to the movement, just as they have been important to all eras of Italian cinema production.

During the 1930s a new generation of directors and actors came forward and were able to experiment with the new technical capabilities of sound cinema. Mario Soldati, Luigi Chiarini, Renato Castellani, and Mario Camerini were all active in the revival of popular melodramatic films. Their work would later be ridiculed by the Cinema group as that of calligraphers whose highly stylized films emphasized elements that were far from reality and in some ways conformed with fascist ideology. Melodrama was no stranger to Italian culture and narrative. Gramsci wrote extensively about the genre and places the origins of Italian melodrama in the 16th century with its apex to be found in the lyrical operas of Verdi in the 19th century.[2] It should come as no shock then, that some early sound films produced in Italy drew heavily from melodramatic operas. With the 1931 release of Camerini's *Figaro e la sua gran giornata* "Italy had successfully found her own style of sound film that related to her own cultural tradition" (Mancini 33). The success of melodramatic films allowed for the genre to expand and it became a primary means of expression for Italian cinema during the last half of the Fascist ventennio. The prominence of melodrama in Italian

[2]Gramsci's thoughts on melodrama and its relationship to Italian culture can be found in his work *Letteratura e vita nazionale*.(Rome: Riuniti, 1979) 94-96.

cinema during this period prompted the call from the Cinema group to move away from melodramatic representations towards the establishment of a national cinematic language grounded upon realist narratives and the veristic tradition of the late 19th century.

De Sica began his acting career during this period and played the leading man in many melodramas and comedies. He was keenly aware of the productions that were coming out and his early forays into directing upheld the comic and melodramatic structures of the time. His mentor as a young actor and new director was Mario Camerini, perhaps one of the more successful directors of the period.[3] As De Sica moved towards a more purposeful cinema with the production of *I bambini ci guardano*, he embraced discussing more serious, pertinent issues that would later find a clearer voice in his postwar works, but he did so within the generic parameters that Italian cinema presented him at the time, which included melodrama.[4]

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[3]De Sica stated his respect and admiration for Camerini on numerous occasions and admitted that Camerini was a strong influence in his approach to Cinema. For De Sica's comments about Camerini see Francesco Savio, "Vittorio De Sica," in Tullio Kezich, ed., Cinecittà anni trenta: parlano 116 protagonisti del secondo cinema italiano (1930-1943)Rome: Bulzoni, 1979), 484-85. Zavattini also held Camerini in high esteem, extolling him as a master of his art.Paolo Nuzzi and O. Iemma, De Sica e Zavattini Parliamo tanto di noi (De Sica and Zavattini: Let's Talk about Us) (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1997), 34

[4]For an analysis of the continuity between De Sica's films pre WWII and post WWII see Carlo Celli, "The Legacy of Mario Camerini in Vittorio De Sica's The Bicycle Thief (1948)", *Cinema Journal* 40.4, 2001, 3-17. For a discussion on the continuity of Italian cinema pre WWII and post WWII see Gianfranco Casadio, *Adultere, Fedifraghe, innocenti: La donna del "neorealismo poplare" nel cinema italiano degli anni cinquanta*, (Ravenna: Longo, 1990).

Melodrama is an excellent vehicle for the transmission of ideology. It has the ability to neatly define and divide the world and characters into clear cut roles. It's focus on personal conflicts and identity make it accessible to audiences of all levels and endow it with the ability to teach and instruct in a pleasurable, popular format. This is precisely why the Cinema group was adamantly opposed to the melodramas that were being produced under fascist Italy. They viewed them as implicit vehicles of fascist ideology that had little artistic value (Landy, *Folklore* 28). The irony of their position is that wittingly or not, the neorealist counter movement incorporated melodrama as an important part of their signification system, changing the who and what is represented, but the how it is represented includes elements of melodrama, particularly with regards to music and to a certain extent plot structure. All of the early neorealist films contained significant elements of melodrama in their plot structures. Excess emotion, the threat of violence and the use of music to mark emotional transitions are hallmarks of Rossellini films. Later, as the movement fractured in the mid 1950s, Guido Aristarco and *Cinema Nuovo* would crown Visconti's *Senso*, which was an historical melodrama, as the future direction of the movement. Even in *Umberto D.* we find elements of melodrama despite Zavattini's acknowledged repugnance for the genre. Given the place of melodrama within the neorealist movement, it follows that to understand De Sica and Zavattini's

collaborations one must understand how they utilized melodrama.

In the case of *I bambini ci guardano*, a series of triangular relationships are presented throughout the film. Triangulations are not uncommon in melodramatic texts, often times they serve as points of pressure causing the characters, Pricò and Andrea in particular, to become more and more restricted in what they view as their options for the future. The triangulations are indeed present in Viola's text, but they aren't nearly as important as they are in the film. De Sica expands the use of the triangle by creating several scenes that did not exist in the novel. He and Zavattini bring attention to it make a major theme that motivates characters and causes dramatic tension for the viewer.

The film opens with an excursion to Villa Borghese, where Nina has planned to see her lover Roberto. As Nina and Pricò enter the park, they see a puppet play going on. The puppets present a standard love triangle, with Pulcinella as the lead male, and another puppet who threatens his relationship with his true love. The play ends happily with Pulcinella and his lover getting back together and the puppeteers' daughter going through the crowd asking for tips. Nina appears oblivious to the girl's petition and Pricò has to remind her to tip the girl. Some critics have seen this as a critique of Nina and the complacency

of bourgeois society in general.[5] However, they always divorce Nina's mental lapse from the context of the puppet play she had just watched in which Pulcinella converses and reasons with his rival, stating that even though the woman loves both of them, she can only marry one of them. It could be that Nina's lapse is directly linked to what she has just witnessed, realizing the irony of life as an imitation of art. However, this scene is perhaps more ironic for the viewer, as s/he is able to "register the difference from a superior position. Pathos results from non-communication or silence made eloquent" (Elsaesser 77). The puppet show's theme subtly prepares the audience for the eventual conflict, but also allows them to look back on it after the fact and see the irony of it.

Shortly after the puppet show, Nina and Roberto meet and exchange tender words with each other. Roberto encourages her to leave her husband and come live with him. During their encounter, Pricò sees them from a distance, feels that something is wrong, or that Roberto represents a threat to his stability and immediately goes to his mother's side, interrupting them unexpectedly. What follows is an awkward situation of Nina trying to cover up her apparent infidelity by rushing Pricò away, but expecting him to acknowledge Roberto by saying hello or goodbye. Pricò refuses to acknowledge him, seemingly secure in

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[5]See Peter Bondanella's *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*. (New York: Continuum) 2001, 33. as well as Mira Liehm's *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present*. (Berkeley: Uof California P) 1984, 77.

his position, or perhaps like his father, he is unwilling to recognize that his mother is unhappy with her current life.

The Pricò, Nina and Roberto triangle is not the only triangle throughout the film. The motif is carried on to the countryside where Pricò's father sends him after Nina had left. He is put under the supervision of Paolina, a teenage girl who has eyes for the local pharmacist. Viola's description of this scene is more detailed and shows the feelings that Pricò was beginning to develop for Paolina, who was his only playmate and not too much older than him. De Sica simplified this section of the film (likely to save time) yet in the brief moment dedicated to it he shows his ability to synthesize an emotion and distill it to its essence. De Sica's framing of the scene visually creates the relationship between Pricò and the girl as one of maternal affection similar to what he had with Nina. This is made clear the nanny tucks him into his bed. The camera assumes the same position and shot sequence as it did when Nina tucked Pricò in the night she left with Roberto. The identical frame for both scenes serves as an efficient communication of the parallels between the two relationships. Like Nina, the nanny also intends to sneak out to have a rendevous with her lover, but Pricò is determined not to be abandoned and pretends to sleep, only to follow her out and spy on her and the pharmacist. His plans go awry when he knocks a plant off the balcony and it lands on Paolina's head. Pricò is to blame and must return

to live with his father. The scene cements the triangular structure of the film, with Pricò at its center. It emphasizes the loss he feels for his mother and shows his helplessness in the wake of her's and other's actions. Pricò's world has been disrupted and he has been thrown into a chaotic world that he doesn't understand and he cannot control.

A semblance of control returns as Nina comes to visit her sick son. The scene has a slight Oedipal sense to it as Pricò commands his mother to stay, regardless of what father says. When Agnese asks him what authority he has to enforce this order he responds "Se la mamma va via me nevado con lei" as though the two were more than mother and son. Shortly after, Andrea enters the room and sees Nina with Pricò. The camera is positioned behind Nina and Pricò to show the father enter the room, displaying all the elements of the triangle, arranged spatially within the frame. It then cuts to a medium shot of Andrea, who sternly reproves Nina for having returned and demands an explanation for her actions. He becomes the menacing presence, threatening to disrupt once more Pricò's relationship with Nina. The camera cuts to a reverse shot of Nina and Pricò, who looks to his mother. Nina turns away from him, the camera cuts to a closeup of Pricò and cuts back to a medium shot of Nina who begins to walk away from the bed. Pricò calls to her, and begins to cry. His sobs are heard off screen for a moment and then the camera cuts to him as he wipes tears from his

eyes. What follows is a series of well balanced shots that cut from Nina as Pricò looks at her, to Andrea as Nina looks at him, and then back to Pricò as Andrea looks at him. Pricò returns his father's gaze, still crying and the camera then cuts back to Andrea, who shows compassion for his son's pain and begrudgingly allows Nina to stay. The classic construction of the scene heightens the tension between the three elements of the triangle. The three are spaced and organized within the scene at equal distances one from another, which gives them equal part in the scene and equal part in the suffering. Pricò suffers for the loss of his mother, Nina for the guilt of abandoning her child and the repression of domestic life, and Andrea for the scorn of having lost his wife to another man and his inability to take decisive control the situation. The scene brings to ming Elsaesser's thoughts on victimization in melodrama:

> One of the characteristic features of melodramas in general is that they concentrate on the point of view of the victim: what makes the films mentioned above exceptional is the way they manage to present all the characters convincingly as victims. The critique – the questions of "evil," of responsibility is firmly placed on a social and existential level, away from the arbitrary and finally obtuse logic of private motives and individualized psychology. (86)

In addition to presenting all three as victims of the situation, the scene is an example of a typical plot device found in melodrama where catastrophe is delayed in order to allow for a build up of emotion, thus punctuating the final crisis. Generally a series of delays occurs which allow for a rise and fall of

emotions, increasing tension and pressure within the narrative, giving less space for characters to act freely. The next example of a rise in tension towards the final collision occurs after the reconciliation between Nina and Andrea as Roberto returns and threatens the family's rediscovered equilibrium.

Roberto tries to persuade Nina to come back with him. He forces himself through the door and Pricò tries to defend his mother but she sends him to another room. The action focuses on Pricò and his suffering as he listens to the other two argue in the front room. He calls for Agnese, the maid, who doesn't respond, and then decides to confront them on his own. When he enters the room he sees Roberto shaking his mother by the shoulders and runs to attack her aggressor, biting him on the hand. Roberto rebuffs him and Pricò falls to the floor. De Sica's interpretation of this scene is less violent than Viola's, where Roberto actually chokes and strikes Nina and tells her that if it weren't for Pricò's intervention he would have killed her. It is likely that such violence, perpetrated in Nina's home nonetheless, would have been too offensive for viewers' tastes. This triangle between Pricò, Nina and Roberto is repeated at the resort but with different results. Pricò spies Nina and Roberto on the beach, but he does not confront them. Instead, he flees, and tries to return to his father, beginning one of the more emotional sequences of the film where Pricò is nearly hit by a train, scared by a drunk, and finally found by the police and returned to his mother

amidst the glaring crowd at the hotel.

De Sica's emphasis on triangulations throughout the film is an effective melodramatic tool that emphasizes the helplessness of Pricò. The triangle always involves Pricò, there is never a triangle that involves adults only, which offers a poignant statement about the actions of adults and how they affect innocent parties. To put it in Elsaesser's terms, De Sica records the complete failure of the family "to act in a way that could shape the events and influence the emotional environment, let alone change the stifling social milieu" (78). Furthermore, Andreas suicide causes Pricò to prematurely become aware of the realities of life, which, though narrated in an excessively sentimental manner, give cause to consider the relationship between melodrama and reality.

Wagstaff defines melodrama by contrasting "two alternative metaphysical hypotheses regarding the ontology of a human being" (Wagstaff 61). The two hypotheses are first "the individual has ontological primacy, and society derives its existence from the primacy of the individual" and second, "social organisms have ontological primacy, and the individual exists as a component of an organism" (Wagstaff 61). These two contrasting ontologies potentially create two different genres. The first creates an heroic individual whose strong character gives him dominion over nature (chaos) and transforms it through struggle and labor. Through this struggle the hero and other heroic individuals create an

associational society where individuals act in their own interest, not necessarily in the interest of society. This matrix narrates how humankind progresses. The second ontology creates a melodramatic narrative wherein the individual is a part of an organic community. S/he cannot control nature, but is a component of it. "Individuals are not interchangeable but, like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, 'fit' into the organism from which they derive their existence" (Wagstaff 63). Extreme individualism causes the fabric of the community to tear, which in turn disrupts the "puzzle" and causes individuals to desire a return to the idyllic original, but cannot and therefore must register the loss of the original idyllic state. The heroic character seeks to transform nature into the lost idyll, the melodramatic character seeks to discover a new place in nature. The heroic character is active, the melodramatic character is contemplative. The heroic narrative describes the actions of the characters, the melodramatic narrative imitates the characters' thought process (Wagstaff 64).

Of the two ontologies discussed, De Sica and Zavattini clearly fall into the second category. This is not to say that they are political ideologues, on the contrary, they would have considered themselves humanists before they considered political affiliation. De Sica stated on numerous occasions that the search for solidarity was a central theme in his works. Zavattini clearly advocated that knowing and understanding other people was an essential aspect

of humanity. Their view of humanism fit most closely with the second ontology. This ontological frame of reference, combined with a cultural predisposition to melodramatic narratives, allows for greater understanding of the role melodrama played in their cinema. In the case of *I bambini ci guardano* a clear compromise is registered between the melodramatic aesthetic and the realist poetics that the tandem would develop in their postwar films. This fusion of the two should not be seen as problematic as a film can present multiple referents. Hence a western can refer to a specific event in history on one level, but on a deeper level it can also present the heroic adventure matrix illustrating humankind's struggle with nature and the constant efforts to tame and transform it. It is here that a narrative is formed, it fuses the particular and the general and organizes them into a meaningful hierarchy. De Sica and Zavattini adapted a melodramatic novel the screen, updated it to portray contemporary societal aspects and used melodrama as a way to analyze Italian culture at the end of the fascist ventennio. Melodrama becomes a means of expressing and analyzing the realities of the period. Critics of the day saw the realist tendencies of the film. As one critic for the *Corriere della Sera* put it:

> La rappresentazione delle disgraziate vicende del povero Pricò è misurata e saremmo tentati di dire pudica, se l'aggettivo, adatto a definire l'aspetto formale del film, non fosse invece inadattissimo a definirne la sostanza. La quale è di un realismo crudele e tremendo, tutta intenta a esprimere la sofferenza di un fanciullo. (Radice, as cited in Prudenzi 198)

The reality of *I bambini ci guardano* is seen in the representation of a family with all of its pains, sorrows, worries, troubles and warts. It doesn't shy away from an analysis of bourgeois life and its pettiness, nor does it lack for sentimentalism. The fusion of melodrama and realism found in *I bambini ci guardano* illustrates an important step in De Sica's and Zavattini's careers. It's emphasis on human suffering and selfishness and the lack of solidarity cause viewers to look forward and see hints of their greatest collaborations. On the other hand, the obvious references to the deeper elements of the hierarchy, through the use of melodrama, allow this reality to transcend the superficial action and become an enduring piece of art.

Ladri di biciclette

On November 22, 1949 at the Cinema Barberini in Rome, the premiere of what is still recognized today as one of the most important films ever made took place – *Ladri di biciclette*. The audience included a unique melange of long time cinema professionals, respected film critics, the upper crust of Rome's intelligentsia, along with the actors and their families, who represented some of the poorest social classes in contemporary Italy. Upon the conclusion of the film, one reporter noted that there was pandemonium as the crowd cheered "Evviva

De Sica! Evviva De Sica!" (Chiaromonte 4). This initial enthusiastic reception soon changed as it did not take long for critics and audiences to find fault with the film. Many took exception to its grim outlook on life during a holiday season. Its tone did not fit the time of year. Catholic critics took offense at the depiction of the church. Government officials were upset that the film showed Italy in a negative light. Communist critics were disconcerted by the lack of solidarity that Antonio found amongst his fellow workers. One complaint in particular, which nearly always makes the history books, is that of Luigi Bartolini, the author of the novel on which the film was based.

Shortly after the release of the film, Bartolini complained that the film wasn't representative of his work and that it wasn't produced according to contract (Sitney 88-89). Bartolini's disapproval of the film became a prolonged public debate between him and Zavattini, with occasional volleys directed at De Sica. He wrote several letters to literary journals claiming that he had been wronged and that his book had been ruined because of De Sica and Zavattini's betrayals.[6] In his anger with the film Bartolini stated that he'd prefer that everyone say the film had nothing to do with his book (Moneti 248). Zavattini concurred in this point and in a response he writes:

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[6]For a sample and discussion of the letters written by both sides see Guglielmo Moneti's "Ladri di biciclette" in Lini Miccichè's *De Sica: autore, regista, attore*. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992). Zavattini wrote several letters in response, all of which are available in *Una, cento, mila lettere*. (Milano: Bompiani, 1988.) ed. Silvana Cirillo.

> Tu puoi sostenere, in base al contratto, che bisognerà mettere nei titoli di testa che la mia storia è tratta o ispirata dal romanzo di Luigi Bartolini, anche se ai lettori del tuo romanzo sembrerà, vedendo il film che tu e io ci siamo messi d'accordo per beffarlo. Infatti nel film non ci sarà una sola immagine del tuo libro e non c'è neppure nel soggetto. [. . .] Se avessi intitolato il soggetto *Hanno rubato una bicicletta* nessuno avrebbe visto parentela di sorta col tuo libro, per la semplice ragione che parentela non c'era. (*Una, cento, mille* 126)

Zavattini did begrudgingly admit to Bartolini that the reason they signed a contract to purchase the literary rights to the book was to confirm that "l'occasione del sospirato soggetto per De Sica mi era stata offerta dal tuo libro" (*Una, cento, mille* 127).

At first glance Zavattini's and De Sica's interpretations of Bartolini's novel appear to diverge radically, retaining nothing from the original. However, a closer examination reveals many subtle similarities, both of a thematic and structural nature. Despite Zavattini's assertion that the association between the two ends at the shared title, the noted similarities, and the open acknowledgement that Bartolini's novel had in inspiring the adaptation place De Sica and Zavattini's version(s) of *Ladri di biciclette* in a clear position of hypertext(s) to Bartolini's original. There can be no doubt that Bartolini's story, notwithstanding the numerous distortions, transformations, reductions, and extensions it underwent, is still the basis of De Sica and Zavattini's rendition.

In order to analyze and understand the relationships between the two

texts, we must look not only at the similarities between the book and the film, but also at Zavattini's *soggetti* as the primary loci for the transformation that took place. Equally important are the thematic transposition of Bartolini's text (particularly with regards to the bicycle's symbolic status in both texts) and the structural elements, digressions, and style that perhaps initially attracted Zavattini and De Sica to Bartolini's novel and then played a role in the construction of the film.

Bartolini's *Ladri*

Bartolini's *Ladri di biciclette* was published in 1946. Situated in the immediate aftermath of World War II when Italy was still under American occupation, the book recounts Bartolini's autobiographical story of his attempts to recover a bicycle that was stolen right in front of him. The first person narrative reads rather quickly and, as De Sica stated, it is rather colorful and picaresque (Iemma Nuzzi 129). The narrator, motivated by the injustice of the robbery, is determined to retrieve the bicycle at all costs, not because he needs it to work (he uses his spare bicycle to get around and purchases another in the event he weren't able to find the stolen bicycle) but because he finds pleasure in the chase. Bartolini narrates the theft and recovery of not just one bicycle, but of

two. After two days of unsuccessfully searching for the bicycle, he finally tracks down the thief and the possible location of the bicycle, but because of the lack of evidence connecting the thief with the bicycle he is unable to use legal means to recover it. As fortune would have it, a prostitute who once modeled for him in his studio lives near the thief. After some persuasion she agrees to act as an intermediary and negotiate the return of the bicycle.

Zavattini's first soggetto

Zavattini first contacted Bartolini sometime in the spring of 1947. As Bartolini recalls: "Zavattini, un bel mattino, mi telefonò che aveva passato una notte in bianco: preso dal piacere della lettura del 'meraviglioso' mio libro; allora mi suggerì di mandarne, in lettura, una copia al De Sica: che parimenti parve preso così intensamente dal piacere della lettura dei diritti di cinematografia" (Iemma Nuzzi 128). Subsequently in July of that same year, Bartolini sold the rights to Zavattini and De Sica for 100,000 lira. According to the contract, the two were free to use the story as they saw fit but were obligated to use the same title in the Italian release of the film.[7]

Upon the acquisition of the literary rights, Zavattini wrote an initial

[7]A legible facsmile of the original contract can be seen in Robert Gordon, *Bicycle thieves [Ladri di biciclette]* (New York: Palgrave, McMillan, BFI, 2008) 24.

cinematic treatment for De Sica. In an Italian context, particularly from end of the silent era through the Sixties, a cinematic treatment (*soggetto*) was the de facto first step in film production.[8] A *soggetto* often outlines the major elements of the plot from beginning to end and then offers character descriptions. At that point the *soggetto* was shopped around for funding or, in some cases, a director. Producers and directors used the *soggetto* as a means to gauge the cinematic potential of the story. In some cases multiple drafts were written in order to flesh out the characters and/or plot. This approach is interestingly very literary and very theatrical in that it offers a type of stage directions for any future collaborators and, as shall be seen, it invites an adaptation and interpretation of the *soggetto* itself, thus adding another layer to the hypertextual nature of both cinema and cinematic adaptations. The *soggetto* for any literary adaptation by default becomes a hypertext to the original novel and in turn the final cut of the film becomes a hypertext of the *soggetto*, which now functions both as a hypertext and a hypotext. The entire process becomes an adaptation by degree.

Zavattini's first *soggetto* jettisoned the main protagonist as an artist with elevated tastes and ample resources, both temporal and financial, in favor of a simple working man, a bill poster who lives in San Basilio, a suburb of Rome

[8]Many film and trade journals during that time, including *Cinema nuovo*, *Bianco nero*, *Filmcritica*, and *La rivista del cinema*, regularly published *soggetti* that screenwriters were interested in selling or that the editors of the journal felt would be provocative.

found at the extreme northwestern edge of the city limits. The story begins with investigative reporters interviewing a seemingly apolitical worker whose idea of sufficient social reform is the repair of his roof. Antonio has a son (Ciro) who accompanies him throughout the search, whereas Bartolini's protagonist searches for the bicycle on his own, without aid[9]. A prostitute aids in the search of the bicycle, but the bicycle is never returned. These changes transform the nature of Bartolini's story significantly, yet certain elements are retained and clearly show the reliance on the original novel, and thereby allow the reader to see Zavattini's initial reinterpretation of it.

The second and definitive *soggetto* was completed in April 1948, around the same time that the script was completed. This second *soggetto* was much closer in pertinent details to the final version of the film, yet it is not identical as several details from the first *soggetto* are omitted from the second but later find a place in the film. A good way to understand the nature of the transformation that occured is to compare all four texts to each other.

What follows is a table that illustrates the main narrative points of each text, placing them side by side with Bartolini's novel on the right, Zavattini's *soggetti* in the center, and De Sica's film on the left. Each narrative point is numbered so as to be able to make easy reference to a specific instance, scene, or

[9]It should be noted that Bartolini's protagonist is a father and does make several references to his daughter, though she is never actually present at any point in the narration.

sequence. A comparison of the various narratives allows for a clearer vision of the similarities, differences, revisions, and reinterpretations that took place during the textual *iter* from Bartolini's novel to De Sica's film, as well as the relationships between the variant texts.

Film (D)	Final Subject (C)	First Subject (B)	Bartolini's Novel (A)
1. Antonio gets a job as a poster hanger from the ufficio collocamento and is told the job requires a bicycle.	1. Begins with a discussion of the value of reporting everyday facts and a description of Antonio, who is a new poster hanger. He and his wife live in Val Melaina. His wife hocked her sheets in order to get the bicycle out of hock. He belongs to a leftist party but does his job equally well while hanging posters for rightwing political parties.	1. Antonio is interviewed by journalists in S. Basilio on living conditions. Expresses hopes for roof repair. The reporters promise that the story will be published.	1. Theft of the bicycle occurs while he stepped inside a shop in Piazzetta del Teatro di Pompeo. He sees the thief mount and ride away. He chases the thief, but is distracted by two accomplices who enable the thief to escape.

2. He returns to the his apartment at Val Melaina where Maria, his wife is getting water. Laments the fact that he has a job but may not be able to take it. Maria begins washing their sheets.	2.Theft of the bicycle occurs while on a ladder hanging a poster near Traforo. Antonio chases him but two accomplices steer him in the wrong direction, allowing the thief to escape.	2.Theft of the bicycle occurs while on a ladder hanging a poster. Brief chase ensues but ends in chaos with the whereabouts of the thief and bicycle unkown.	2.He decides to search search in Piazza del Monte which is where others have told him all the stolen bicycles are sold. While searching he sees a man dismantling a bicycle, and repainting another.
3. They take the sheets to the pawnbroker to get the bicycle out of hock. (B,C)	3. He immediately goes to the police station to report it. A Zavattinian diatribe against the police ensues.	3. A policeman accompanies Antonio the station, where it is clear he won't get it back through them.	3. After an unsuccessful search he decides to go to Porta Portese where he ends up puchasing another bicycle and takes it home.

4. Antonio reports to his new job to get his uniform. He and Maria enjoy riding the bicycle.	4. He returns to Val Melaina where his friend Baoiocco advises him to look at the market in Piazza Vittorio. His wife refrains from crying to save face.	4. Returns home by bus, tells wife and son (Ciro). Others tell him he can look in Piazza Vittorio or Porta Portese.	4. Returns to Porta Portese and enters a shop that specializes in dismantling and assemblying bicycles. He asks to see a bicycle that looks like his and the owner protests. A policeman is called. After establishing it isn't his bicycle he argues some with the owner, who is upset at the accusation of malfeasance.
5. Maria pays a visit to Santona (Via della Paglia) to pay her because she had predicted Antonio's successful job search.	5. At dawn the next day Bruno and Antonio are at Piazza Vittorio. Baiocco's friends help	5. Departs early with son, who knows the bicycle better than anyone.	5. He leaves the shop and goes over the details of the theft in his mind and makes a mental image of the thief.

6. The morning of first day Antonio and Bruno prepare to go to work	6. They go to Porta Portese, it rains, the market packs up and leaves. In the commotion they see the thief speaking with an old man.	6. Piazza Vittorio, Ciro is yelled at for touching some bicycle parts. He meets a pedophile and runs away only to see a woman robbed of her purse.	6. Early morning encounter with thieves in Via Mattonato, who recognize him and know he's looking for his bicycle.
7. Antonio learns the basics from a co-worker and then is on his own hanging posters.	7. Antonio confronts the old man to find out who the thief is. The old man pretends to not know who he is talking about	7. Antonio searches for the pedophile, finds and accuses him. Others defend the pedophile saying he was only trying to console Ciro, who was crying.	7. Elderly woman was robbed in church by a child, crowd turns on the woman as the child shrieks and feigns injury.
8. Theft of the bicycle occurs while on a ladder hanging a poster. Antonio chases him but two accomplices steer him in the wrong direction, allowing the thief to escape. (B,C, similar, though not identical to A)	8. They follow the old man into a church where a mass for the poor is going on. The old man escapes.	8. The two get on a bus to Porta Portese, Ciro keeps crying and Antonio threatens to slap him	8. Encounters prostitutes selling stolen goods in Piazza del Monte

9. Antonio goes immediately to the police station where his call for help falls on deaf ears. (B,C,)	9. Bruno criticizes Antonio, who then hits him violently.	9. At Porta Portese there are many many bicycles, all too expensive for him to purchase. Someone advises him to go to a woman in contact with Padre Pio.	9. Returns to scene of crime (Piazzetta del Teatro di Pompeo)
10. He catches a bus at Porta Pia, picks up Bruno and they walk home together.	10. Antonio hears cries from the river and thinking it might be Bruno (who had momentarily left him after the beating) he runs to the river only to see it isn't Bruno.	10. They go to the psychic, who tells Antonio that he will find the bicycle but he must pray. He thanks her and leaves	10. Discussion with bookseller about thieves

11. Upon their arrival, Antonio tells Bruno to go up to the apartment while he goes to find Baiocco at the dopolavoro. He consults with Baiocco, Maria enters and is in tears over the theft. Baiocco says they should go to Piazza Vittorio because that's where all the stolen bicycles end up. (A,B,C,)	11. They go to a trattoria to lighten their mood. While there, Antonio calculates their finances for the rest of the month.	11. They go to an osteria to eat. They are angry with each other and in order to make peace Antonio buys some wine for Ciro. He calculates their meager finances for the rest of the month, only to realize they'll be short.	11. Sees the thief across the way and gets his name from the bookseller
12. They group search Piazza Vittorio the next morning early. Bruno meets pedophile and Antonio accuses the man painting the frame of theft. A policeman is called. The frame is not Antonio's. (A,B,C)	12. With no real hope they go to visit Santona, a visionary woman his wife knows (she is described as a fraud). Santona tells him he'll either find it immediately or he won't find it at all.	12. They start looking in different bicycle shops and in Via Panico Antonio sees the thief.	12. Follows thief on bicycle to Via Panico.

13. They drive to Porta Portese where they hope to search for the bicycle (A)	13. Upon leaving Santona's place they immediately see the thief. Antonio grabs him by the collar and commands him to give back his bicycle. A crowd gathers and threatens Antonio. Bruno finds a policeman and the crowd is calmed.	13. They follow him, he goes into a brothel to avoid them.	13. Thief realizes he's being followed and confrontation ensues, brothel mentioned.
14. While taking shelter from the rain Antonio recognizes the thief talking to an old man. The thief leaves before they can get to him and they follow the old man to a church. (A,B,C)	14. The policeman searches the thief's room and explains to Antonio that he has no case because there is no evidence and the thief's friends and neighbors will provide a solid alibi. Antonio is convinced that there is no legal means for him to get his bicycle back.	14. A prostitute is moved by the scene and tells them that she'll get the bicycle back.	14. Other thieves arrive, Carabiniere comes and breaks it up.

15. At the church a charitable mass for the poor is being held. Despite Antonio's efforts to get information from the old man, he escapes.	15. They leave and head towards Via Flamminia and the stadium to catch the bus home.	15. They go to a nearby building but she is unable to get it because it isn't in the storehouse.	15. He goes to the police where he is convinced that an official accusation based on the evidence (recognition of thief) will only bring more trouble
16. Bruno criticises Antonio and Antonio slaps him. Afterwards, Bruno is sullen and avoids his father, staying back from him	16. Antonio sends Bruno to the bus stop and tells him he'll meet him at home.	16. They return home on the bus, a passenger complains that Ciro's shoes soiled his pants. Ciro cries. While the passenger complains Antonio takes Ciro in his arms, gets off the bus and walks towards their apartment building as Ciro continues to cry.	16. Returns home and recounts memories of another bicycle and how he recovered it. (Major digression)

17. They are walking near the river. Antonio hears cries for help coming from the river, and thinks that Bruno is drowning. Bruno is not the person crying for help. He is safe and the two reuinte	17. Antonio attempts to steal a bicycle propped up against a building, but fails and is stopped by a crowd of men. Bruno was unable to get on the bus, witnessed the event and runs to his father crying. The crowd lets them go out of pity.		17. He debates stealing a bicycle but rejects the idea and decides to go through a prostitute he knows who lives in Via Panico.
18. While walking on the Lungotevere, Antonio decides to go to take Bruno to eat a pizza. The two go to a restaurant and eat. Bruno drinks wine, and Antonio calculates how much money they have left.	18. Antonio doesn't have the courage to look at Bruno. They walk for a while and then get on a bus. While they ride the bus Bruno falls asleep on Antonio's shoulder as two passengers argue.		18. Meets with Linda (the prostitute) whose friend agrees to negotiate for him

19. They go to see Santona in the hopes she'll give them word on the bicycle. She tells them that they'll either find it immediately or they won't find it at all.			19. Bicycle is returned for the sum of £15.000 and a silver ring for Linda.
20. In the street outside of Santona's building they encounter the thief and chase him through a brothel. Antonio grabs him and drags him outside where a crowd forms and threatens Antonio and Bruno.			

20. Bruno gets the attention of a policeman, who intervenes and searches the thief's room. While searching he convinces Antonio that he has little chance of winning legally based on the scanty evidence. It's his word against the thief's and the crowd outside.			
21. Antonio is convinced that nothing will come of an attempt to find the bicycle through legal means and leaves Via Panico.			
22. They walk towards the stadium and Antonio decides to send Bruno home alone and says he has something to do, that they'll meet at home.			

23. Antonio unsuccessfully attempts to steal a bicycle. He is quickly caught. Bruno, who missed his bus, witnesses the event and runs to his father crying. The crowd lets them go out of pity. They walk away in the crowd of soccer fans exiting the stadium.			

The progression from novel to film presents a complex relationship that can be interpreted within an intertextual dialogism. The *soggetti* are of particular interest, for they act as both hypotext and hypertext to the film and the novel respectively. They act as a middle ground, a space of mediation between Bartolini's novel and De Sica's film. Their summary nature causes them to bridge the gap between the novel and the film. Thus, it is essential to analyze *Ladri di biciclette* the film, as not one text but three. Each *soggetto* takes on a life of its own as hypertext, transposition of the original, but only when combined do they create the appropriate hypotext for the cinematic version.

The transpositions that take is in the first *soggetto* are clear. The

artist/narrator becomes Antonio, an apolitical poster hanger, from whom a bicycle is stolen and unless it is found, he will be forced to spend extra money on bus fares to get to and from the city. The narrator's daughter, who is referred to on several occasions throughout the narration, but never present, is transposed into a young boy, whose role is a clear amplification of the original character's role and presence.

In the second *soggetto*, the son's name changes, as does the location of the family's home from S. Basilio to Val Melaina, which adds layers to the story. First, Val Melaina is farther from Rome than San Basilio. At the time it was literally in the countryside with miles of open fields between it and the city walls. The commute, without a personal means of transport, was either expensive or very time consuming. Second, and perhaps more significant given the political climate, is the fact that the complexes were built by the Fascist regime, but left uncompleted. The subtle jab at the political predecessors who were unable to provide for the needs of the people and their relationship to the current government and its impotence becomes a noticeable sub-theme throughout the film.

The second *soggetto* also presents a politicized Antonio who is deeply committed to the left but still hangs political posters for rival parties. This is the only instance of an overt political affiliation, as De Sica's Antonio appears aloof

and uninterested in politics. This could perhaps be seen as Zavattini writing a little bit of himself into the character as he was first and foremost a humanist, with leftist sympathies. The most notable change in the second *soggetto* is that instead of searching in vain and returning home without a bicycle, Antonio attempts to steal a bicycle and fails, only to have Bruno witness the whole event. The change is somewhat contrived and theatrical. Its addition was likely to add drama and tragical nuances, and it did allow for the exploitation of the title, giving it a double entendre that would delight critics for years to come.[10]

In De Sica and Zavattini's versions of *Ladri di biciclette* a reductive transposition and an augmentative thematic transposition function together to create a scenario in which the suppression of certain elements and the addition of others create a subsitition to the original. The reductive nature of Zavattini's transposition of Bartolini's novel (particularly in the *soggetti*) is clear and should be the first discussed as it is the easiest to identify. The transposition and extension of the theme(s) found in the film is somewhat more subtle and will be discussed later.

[10]For a detailed analysis of the classic, formalist techniques employed by De Sica in *Ladri di biciclette* see Kristen Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988) 205-220.

Reduction in Zavattini's *soggetti*

Many plot elements, characters and locations are eliminated in Zavattini's two *soggetti*. Zavattini's versions are also much more linear than Bartolini's as they eliminate the abundant digressions found in the original. Part of this linearity is inherent to the nature of the *soggetto*, which is fundamentally a summary of the story and action. Perhaps the better term is a condensation. The *soggetti* abridge both the film and the novel, thereby creating new texts that stand on their own and offer commentary on the other two and each other.

This concept of condensation as a means of reduction is evident in the first *soggetto*, which is the most similar to Bartolini's novel. The most noticeable carry overs from the novel to the *soggetti* are found in the encounters with the police (B3, A15), tracking the bicycle to Via Panico and the ensuing confrontation with the thief (B12-B13, A12-A13), and the prostitute as an intermediary between the victim and the thieves (B14, A18). Zavattini condenses the action of the novel by simplifying it to essentially two characters and their search for the bicycle. The condensation of the novel's action acts as a commentary to the original. It highlights elements and details which are found in the original (descriptions of everyday life and situations, and references to the marginalized classes of society; thieves, prostitutes, and the poor) thereby giving them a greater role in the narrative. Zavattini places a higher value on those aspects of the Bartolini's story

that fit better with his positions on representing reality. He reduces the narrative to its essence by suppressing (eliminating) those details that detract from the everyday. Thus, the realistic elements which are present in Bartolini's novel, but not prominent or essential to its meaning, take center stage in Zavattini's *soggetti.*

The *soggetti* (and in turn the film) also perform a function of approximation, which is to say that they update the drama and the action in contemporary terms, thus bringing it closer to what the audience knows and experiences every day. Even though the difference between the publication of the book and the release of the film is only four years, a great deal had changed in Italy in that time. Bartolini depicts a recently liberated Rome, but still under the control of the Allies. His novel is narrated in those terms, they are specific to a different time, one that, though still not far away, was quickly being forgotten. The proximization also is in line with the direction that Zavattini and De Sica wanted to push their cinema, that is to chronicle contemporary events and to show contemporary reality in the hopes that the knowledge gained would spark change.

Thematic transpositions

Another way of interpreting the relationship between Bartolini's novel

and De Sica and Zavattini's texts is found in their respective themes. A thematic transposition is essentially a deliberate act of transformation where the meaning is changed as an explicit purpose of the transposition (Genette *Palimpsests* 214). An extension is an augmentation by massive addition that keeps within the stylistic boundaries already set. It extends the action, adds details that were previously not part of the hypotext (Genette *Palimpsests* 254). De Sica and Zavattini's versions of *Ladri* accomplishes both of these functions by transforming the metaphorical significance of the bicycle (thematic transposition) and retaining some diaristic elements from the novel and extending their significance, both structurally and thematically.

Diary in *Ladri*

One could inquire as to why Zavattini was even interested in the novel, only to completely transform it into something else. Perhaps a possible answer lies in the diaristic nature of Bartolini's *Ladri di biciclette*. The short novel resembles more a diary with its frequent digressions and lack of a linear narrative. Aside from narrating in the first person, Bartolini doesn't spare many details about his adventures. He waxes poetic when describing roast chestnuts and doesn't hesitate to delve into details regarding a character's dress, gate,

smell, and motives. He never passes up an opportunity to provide commentary on contemporary Italian society, particularly as it pertains to Rome, thieves, and fascists. Though not very evident in the summary provided in the table above, Bartolini's novel reads as a series of digressions united under a common event (Wagstaff 292). The first two days of the narration, every encounter with another human being offers some new anecdote about the socio-political situation of Rome. The anecdotes create a sort of summa of his experiences and memories with thieves, prostitutes, policemen, and fights he's had, all sparked by a face, a gesture, or a word. Confrontations with thieves allow him to analyze their actions and motives. Conversations with prostitutes remind him of past models and lovers. The narrative is somewhat whimsical, ragged and certainly non-linear as he recounts memory after memory that have no direct relation to the adventure at hand. Almost the entire last third of the book is the narration of a story about another bicycle which was stolen from him, and how he recovered it, as though the current search for the bicycle were not important at all. Yet the compilation of memories and digressions create a tapestry of his life experience and allow us to see the world from his viewpoint.

Zavattini was no stranger to the diary as a literary artform. To say that the diary functioned as his principal *modus operandi* would not be an exaggeration in the least. All of his novels but two (*Totò il buono* and *I poveri sono*

matti) were written in first person. Additionally, from 1940 to 1970 he wrote a column entitled *Diario cinematografico* that regularly appeared in various film journals. His literary corpus makes extensive use of the first person and include all the genres that accompany it including pseudo autobiographies, diaries, and epistolary novels.[11] For Zavattini, the first person narrative allowed him to break down barriers between artist, page, and reality. It functioned as a liberating element. Truthful confessions gave his stories immediacy and sincerity, which fundamentally became the basis for his whole ethos.

The direct, almost improvised style, allowed for personal connection between the writer and the reader. On numerous occasions Zavattini commented on his prediliction with the first person and with diaristic writing, particularly with regards to the effect it could have on others and the desire he had to share personal, human knowledge with others. "Io avevo la vocazione di farlo fare anche agli altri. Il Diario Degli Italiani era una 'summa' in cui stimolavo gli Italiani a raccontarsi e a raccontare. Era il bisogno già provato in me di trovare nessi tra me e le cose, e volevo che le trovassero anche gli altri" (*Opere cinema* 3). Zavattini employed his personal diaries as a tool to organize his thoughts, and to reconcile himself with reality.

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[11]A summary of the many different diaristic projects that Zavattini proposed and realized can be found in Valentina Fortichiari's "Diario" in Guglielmo Moneti, ed. *Lessico zavattiniano:parole e idee su cinema e dintorni.* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992.) 65-77.

At an early phase in his cinematic career Zavattini asserted that "Tutto ciò che accade e accadrà è già in noi in immagini" (as cited in Fortichiari 74). that the world is organized in images began to see cinema as an optimal means of penetrating the depths of the humanity and documenting its existence. "Per quanto mi riguarda dalla carta passerei volentieri a dei film con la pellicola di fotogrammi tutti divisi in due; contemporaneamente si vede io di qua che mangio che bevo che dormo che scrivo la situazione di là. Sentite il rumore della macchina da proiezione del silenzio. [. . .] Il diario dei pensieri di un uomo così fitto che ogni fotogramma sarebbe un pensiero" (*Opere cinema* 135). Zavattini came to this mixed media form of communication quite naturally, his private diaries and many of his short stories are presented as cinematic sequences, concise, lapidary screenplays that offer a concrete image of the action (Fortichiari 74). At a fundamental level Zavattini saw the diary (cinematic or literary) as a means to "raccontare la vita non sul piano dell'intreccio, ma su quello dell'esistenza" (*Opere cinema* 103).

Zavattini had many projects and proposals, both literary and cinematic, that revolved around the diary, most notable are his attempts at creating a reenactment cinema through his *film lampo*. Though not noted for its appearance as a diary, there are digressive elements in the film, that, much like Bartolini's novel give it a sense of a diary at times. This is not to say that Antonio is

authoring his own diary and presenting it to us as a film, but rather that De Sica's inclusion of extra details, the mundane images shown, and the way in which the camera interacts with the entire frame, not just the protagonists.

As noted, Zavattini's *soggetti* are much more linear (mainly because of their truncated nature) and to a certain extent De Sica's film is too. However, De Sica's work in *Ladri* is known for the way in which the camera brings attention to what is happening around the central protagonists, not just what is happening to them.[12] The roaming eye of the camera can be seen as a series of brief digressions that cause the protagonists to share time with the supporting chorus and create a multi-layered narrative. Some well known examples include the quick kick in the pants that Antonio's fellow bill poster gives to the mendicant children as he instructs Antonio in the finer points of his job, the political meeting and the cabaret rehearsal at the dopolavoro, the pedophile in the market, Bruno's famed attempt to relieve himself, the scene at the dopolavoro, and the restaurant scene are often analyzed in this light. In a way, De Sica employs digressions in a manner similar to Bartolini's where the frequent anecdotes and excursuses create a wider frame of reference relative to the narrative backdrop. By diverting the gaze of the camera away from the protagonists and giving space to actions and

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[12]Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*. (New York : Continuum, 2001) 60-61, Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1986) 58-59., P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin : University of Texas Press, 1995.) 92-93.

minute stories that contribute to the overarching narrative, De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* becomes in effect, a type diary because it has a "cadenza che si attaglia perfettamente al diario, un modo che non significa affrettato ma una fluidità che è quella del pensiero e degli stati d'animo" (Fortichiari 73). The digressions, though brief and subtle, assemble images that give expression to Antonio's experience and allow us to see the world through his eyes.

Bicycle as a theme

Bartolini's novel is remarkably accurate in its vivid portrayal of Rome in the aftermath of WWII and its accompanying corruption, vice, and crime. Through all of its digressions multiple commentaries crop up regarding prostitution, the hypocrisy of fascists turned republicans, the corruption of the police department and its complicity in perpetuating the social malaise carried over from the fascist era. One could be confused as to whether or not a clear theme exists as the multiplicity of discourses obfuscate the overarching theme, to which Bartolini hints early on in an explicit reference to the bicycle and its importance to the narrator (and thereby the narrative).

> . . . un poeta come me: che ha giustamente bisogno della bicicletta, come del pane. Se il pane gli serve per sfamarsi alla buona, la bicicletta rappresenta, per lui, come un altro pane: il pane del bene spirituale. Di quel bene spirituale che già conosco e che si

> raggiunge soltanto dopo che s'è lontani dalla città, almeno una dozzina di chilometri, oltre la periferia del suburbio. Ho, dunque necessità, bisogno, della bicicletta, per eclissarmi, scappare, allontanarmi dall'umano consorzio. (*Ladri* 33)

Bartolini assigns a value to the stolen bicycle that is different from the socio-political value commonly associated with the bicycle in De Sica and Zavattini's version. Although its value seems somewhat superfluous and rather bourgeois in light of the apparent misery and hardship in which most of his fellow citizens find themselves, Bartolini's assertion clearly places the bicycle on a metaphoric level, thus suggesting that the search for it and ultimately its recovery could mean more than just having a bicycle for occasional joy rides. The deeper metaphor, and one that Zavattini would appropriate is the symbolic nature of the search. Bartolini's reasons for searching for the bicycle are explained in the final paragraphs of the book.

> Ce n'era perfino tanta da sdegnarmi, con me stesso, per l'importanza da me attribuita al ritrovamento (anzi, al riscatto) d'una bicicletta: ma ripeto che non v'è gusto più sottile di quello del ritrovamento d'una cosa rubataci o smarrita. E se ne potrebbe, per corollario, dedurre che, andando in cerca, in tempi normali, di piaceri, buona cosa potrebbe essere anche la seguente: una qualche persona ci dovrebbe rubare una qualche cosa a noi cara. Rubarcela, s'intende, per scherzare; ma senza far supporre che si sia trattato d'uno scherzo. Correre, la persona derubata, quanto noi abbiamo corso per il ritrovamento della bicicletta. Del resto, non di maggior pondo, né di diversa misura, sono le gioie, rintracciabili, al mondo, nei tempi normali.
>
> Non si tratta, vivendo che di ritrovare il perduto. Lo si può ritrovare una, due volte, tre, come io, per due volte, sono riuscito a ritrovare la bicicletta. Ma verrà la terza volta e ritroverò più nulla.

> Così è ripeto, di tutta l'esistenza. È un correre a ritroso, per finalmente perdere o morire. Un correre a ritroso fin dall'infanzia! Si esce dalla matrice e si piange il comodo alveo perduto; il lattante ha gli occhi chiusi e già cerca, tenta, col naso color petalo di rosa, nel seno della madre, il dolce ed erto capezzolo; poi, perduto il latte, cerca la mano del padre che l'indirizzi ai primi passi. Si cercan fin troppe cose prima di morire. Ed io cercherò un volto amico e troverò soltanto quello di Luciana, se lo troverò: ché sarebbe, per i miei ultimi dolori, già un morire con il sole davanti agli occhi. (*Ladri* 194)

Essentially, the search for the bicycle is the most important aspect of the story. It eclipses all other aspects of the narrative and gives a deeper meaning to the work, a reason for narrating the event. The importance of the bicycle and the search for it is carried over into its cinematic counterpart as well, but with a different emphasis.

Critics have debated the meanings and themes of De Sica/Zavattini's *Ladri di biciclette* since its release. Often they have focused their analyses on the bicycle and its meaning, for which there are numerous possibile interpretations. Generally, the bicycle's value is intrinsically linked to the critic's interpretation of the film. For Millicent Marcus the bicycle is

> the emblem of all those cultural and material forces that determine the relationship [between father and son] from without. When the vehicle is retrieved from hock at the beginning of the film, it enables Antonio to be a conventional patriarch, requiring obedience and respect now that he is once more the chief provider for his dependants' material well being. (*Italian Film* 59)

Marcus believes that the bicycle is representative of patriarchal power and

that De Sica reiterates this by showing two separate scenes where Antonio carries his wife and then his son on the handlebars. In a similar vein of interpretation, Mark West offers some insightful thoughts about the bicycle and its meaning:

> The inflated importance of regaining the bicycle is a kind of inner reflection, projected from the deeps of Antonio's psyche, of an indeterminable fragment splintered off from the rest of his being, and striving to become conscious. In this sense the bicycle becomes everything to Antonio, though it is nothing in itself. [. . .] Antonio's bicycle is valuable to him only because it promises to replace his feelings of despair and futility with a sense of purpose and meaning. (146)

The name brand of the bicycle (*Fides*) and the never-ending search for it suggest that it could be symbolic of modern man's loss of faith and search for it. In the context provided by the film, faith must not be understood in a religious sense, but in a secular sense. The Latin word *fides* does not necessarily have the religious connotation that its modern derivatives "faith" or "fede" have. The term "losing faith," in this sense, does not exclusively, or even overtly, mean that the protagonist Ricci has lost any religious belief he may (or may not) have had prior to our meeting with him in the film. Judging by his remarks about his wife's "little saints" and the prayers she offers to them, it would seem that he did not have much religious faith to begin with and therefore it would be more correct to say that Antonio has lost faith, trust, or confidence in modern society and the institutions that are inherently a part of it. This is evident throughout the film. After Antonio gets the bicycle out of the pawn shop, his spirits are lifted, he

has regained faith in the modern world. Government institutions have found him a job, he can plan to have dreams, to live again. As West notes, the bicycle does give his life meaning (146). He is able (albeit temporarily) to participate as a useful member of society. Without the bicycle he is worthless and his life has little purpose. Hence the urgency to find and regain the bicycle, for a life without faith, be it secular or religious, is a life without hope.

The abundance of available interpretations and meaning, causes one to ask not what the bicycle represents, but what it can represent. In each of the interpretations provided, the recovery of the bicycle (or potential recovery) provides for a return to the fellowship and community that society offers. De Sica has said that all of his films are about the search for human solidarity but that solidarity is eternally fleeting because of mankind's egoism and lack of communication (De Sica on De Sica 37-38). In Bartolini's novel, the protagonist is successful, not only in recovering the bicycle, but in finding solidarity as well as the novel ends with him basking in his thoughts of his daughter's love. We could say that because he found the one he was able to find the other. Antonio, however, is unable to recover the bicycle and only experiences solidarity in fleeting moments throughout the film. Bartolini's successful search leads to the recovery of the bicycle and an implied return to solidarity. Antonio's failed search emphasizes the need for solidarity and the difficulty of finding it. The

contrast between the two outcomes demonstrate that although the two works have much in common, they are still worlds apart.

Miracolo a Milano

Miracolo a Milano is perhaps one of the most well-known and beloved Italian films from the 1950's. The story of a utopian society on the outskirts of Milano where the lines between good and bad are clearly drawn between the good-natured, Christlike Totò and the greedy, conniving businessman Mobbi. The film was a great success in Italy, yet few of its viewers had heard of the book from which it was derived: *Totò il buono*, written by Cesare Zavattini. Published in early 1943, *Totò il buono* was actually based on a film subject that Zavattini and Antonio De Curtis had written together and published in the influential journal *Cinema* in the latter part of 1940. The original project was to shoot a film in which Antonio De Curtis (Totò) would play the part of the hero. Although the two diligently sought funding for the film, they were turned down by all major producers who felt that the film was not marketable and De Curtis gave the rights to the subject to Zavattini, who then reworked the original idea and later published it through Bompiani. Unfortunately, the book was released several weeks before the bombardment of Rome began in July 1943 and it was quickly

forgotten amidst the tumult. From film subject to novel, and back to film (with a title change along the way) *Totò il buono* finally found its originally intended form with the release of *Miracolo a Milano* in 1951.

The work presents some interesting facets with regards to the relationship between film and literature and the adaptation of a literary work to the screen. Rather than take a conventional approach to a literary adaptation by determining where the film betrayed the original text where it was portrayed accurately, I would propose that *Totò il buono* offers a case in which one can observe the creative methodology that Cesare Zavattini employed during his early career as an author and screenwriter. To show this process as it unfolded with *Miracolo a Milano* we will trace the evolution of the three variant texts that exist for *Totò il buono*, (film subject, novel, and film) analyzing the ways in which Zavattini refined, reinterpreted, and altered the story, characters, and gags from the original film subject to write the book, and eventually the film. Throughout this textual *iter* we shall uncover some of the literary antecedents for *Miracolo a Milano* and analyze them as evidence of a methodological approach employed by Zavattini in his early career as a novelist/screenwriter.

The cinematic subject *Totò il buono* was written by Zavattini with the approval and partial collaboration of Antonio de Curtis in the latter part of 1940. The two had previously worked together on Amleto Palermi's *San Giovanni*

decollato through which they developed a relationship that lasted many years. In an interview, Zavattini recalls some of the events that resulted in their collaboration for *Totò il buono*.

> A Milano feci una grossa campagna per Totò, nei primissimi anni Trenta, perché i miei amici mai andavano a vedere questi spettacoli mai andavano al Trianon, io invece ci andavo per via dei residui del mio vecchio amore per il varieté. Insomma, a un certo punto dico "Totò, tu sei il mio uomo!" e scrivo *Totò il buono*. (*Parliamo tanto di noi* 46)

In 1941 the cinematic treatment was published in *Cinema* and shortly afterwards de Curtis relinquished his rights to the story and encouraged Zavattini to continue pursuing the project.

During the early forties Zavattini had fairly serious intentions of becoming a director and making his own films from his own subjects. Had he received the necessary backing, *Totò il buono* could have become his second film.[13] The opportunity to direct did not present itself at that time and despite his contacts' enthusiasm and the support of de Curtis, the project failed to attract funding. Zavattini took the project, refined it and decided to give it life in the form of a novel. Upon discussing it with his publisher, Valentino Bompiani, the two came to an agreement for publishing the book, although it was still unwritten. The project interested Bompiani, as is evidenced by the place it took in their frequent

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[13]". . . Zavattini si è deciso a saltare il fosso: egli dirigerà d'ora in poi ifilm che porteranno il suo nome. [. . .] Il secondo film si intitolerebbe *Totò il buono.* È un film per Totò, il quale ha collaborato anche al soggetto: un Totò angelico di bontà e di candore, capo e protettore di una società di poveri . . ." (*Parliamo tanto di noi* 51).

correspondence. In a letter dated January 1942 Zavattini stated: "Il libro per ragazzi va avanti adagio: ho interrotto tutto avendo dovuto accettare un lavoro cinematografico — per forza — ma è preciso dentro di me sino ai dettagli" (*Una, cento* 46). Then, over a year later and just weeks before the final publication of the book, Zavattini penned a letter to Valentino Bompiani that offers important insights into the sources for the book and, if interpreted correctly, greater understanding as to the author's creative process. With regards to the origins of the characters and gags found in the book he openly tells Bompiani that many of them were taken from sketches he had written some ten years earlier. He even lists the titles of some of the sketches that he revisited and reincorporated in *Totò il buono*.[14] Some of the scenes mentioned include the memorable spectacle of one lucky individual eating chicken in front of the entire shanty town, replacing street names with mathematical equations for didactic purposes, and the fugitive that feigns grief behind the hearse carrying Totò's mother in order to escape the police officers chasing him. Evidently, while writing *Totò il buono* Zavattini saw fit to borrow and recycle some episodes from his earlier works that appeared in

[14]The original text of the letter reads: "Anche a me pare pieno di cose — siccome concetti, cose, spunti, che seminai qua e là dal 1927 al 1932. I poveri affittati come lodatori è del 1927 (*Gazzetta di Parma*), i romanzi a puntate sulle tombe del '929; del '30 quello che segue il funerale per sfuggire i creditori, del '31. La ripetizione carretto su "Flamb" — era *Cateratta Cateratta* sull'*Almanacco* del '32 —;del '31-'32-'33 la trovata del secondino e certe trovate (L'assalto alla befana, Il pediluvio delle 5, ecc.) O la borsa o la mia vita, del '32-'33; il Mangiare pollo come spettacolo del '33-'34, e via dicendo (quello della denominazione delle strade 7 x 8, 9 x 9, è del 1931 (su *Guerin Meschino*)" (*Una, cento* 71).

humorist magazines. Although as a story *Totò il buono* stood alone, it is important to understand exactly what Zavattini recycled and how that fits into his creative process.

The recycled scenes and gags catalogued in the 1943 letter to Bompiani is by no means an all-inclusive list of the recycled material found in *Totò il buono* and its filmic version *Miracolo a Milano*. After a close examination of both texts, we can assert that a total of ten different scenes are found elsewhere in Zavattini's earlier writings (the seven mentioned in the letter, and three others now found in *Al macero*).[15] The amalgamation and reutilization of these texts makes up a narrative patchwork of Zavattinian notions that have been refined and revised to match the tone of *Totò il buono*. Additionally, there are episodes that practically skip the novel and are transplanted directly into the film. Of the scenes that Zavattini recuperated from other texts, there are four that seem to best illustrate Zavattini's methodology in creating *Totò il buono*: "O la borsa o la mia vita", "Il latte bollente", "Il consulto medico" and "La gara mondiale della

[15]A selection of Zavattini's early writings were collected and republished with his collaboration during the 1970's in a volume entitled *Al macero*. Unfortunately, the original publication information of the material is not included in the reprint, and virtually none of the sketches he lists are to be found among those selected for *Al macero*. Guido Conti has done an excellent job of tracing Zavattini's earliest sketches, however, his focus is limited to the years prior to 1931. A comprehensive edition of Zavattini's work as a journalist/humorist during the 1930's has yet to be compiled, which makes the traceability of all of the sketches mentioned in his letter to Bompiani impractical for the purposes of this brief study. The titles for the sketches listed in the letter cited above (with the exception of *Cateratta Cateratta)* are not the original titles, but rather names Zavattini gives the stories as found in *Totò il buono*.

matematica" .

The episode "O la borsa o la mia vita", though not found in the film, is still illustrative of Zavattini's constant refining of stories and gags. In the letter to Bompiani he mentions that the story was published in 1932 in *Guerin Meschino*, yet the framework for the sketch really finds it's roots in Zavattini's first novel, *Parliamo tanto di me*.

Parliamo tanto di me is essentially an extended short story about a man's visit to the afterlife, a sort of dantesque comedy, but a comedy in the modern sense with jokes, gags and humor infused into every page. After having visited Hell and Purgatory, the narrator visits Paradise and upon his arrival three men are introduced to him by his guide, an angel, who in his own virgil-like way, tells the stories of each soul encountered and how they arrived in Paradise. The story of the first soul, Caifa, makes up the following episode, which interests us the most.

> ". . . Caifa è il beniamino degli angeli. Dovete sapere che Caifa si era dato alla macchia per una delusione amorosa. Veramente, anche da piccolo aveva sempre detto: "Quando sarò grande farò il bandito." Fuggito dal paese, si era inselvato rifugiandosi in un tronco d'albero. Se incontrava le guardie, diventava rosso. Una sera incontrò in un solitario viottolo il dottore. Caifa lo fermò. "O la borsa o la vita." Il dottore gli rispose molto seccato: "Che confidenza si prende?" E Caifa:"Faccio sul serio." Il dottore scrollò le spalle e tirò diritto mormorando:"Villano."
>
> "Il brigante avrebbe voluto essere sotterra piuttosto che fare una così brutta figura. Con il cuore molto opresso Caifa si allontanò nella notte." (*Opere* 47-48)

Zavattini must have liked the story of a failed bandit, for its modified version is perhaps even more humorous in *Totò il buono*. The recycled story is found in a section in the book describing the inhabitants of the shanty town founded by Totò. All the major characters are present, along with a string of minor characters that show the diversity of the Baraccopoli's inhabitants.

> Bisogna riconoscere che i baracchesi non davano fastidio ai cittadini veri e propri. C'era stato un caso solo, poco lodevole: un certo Anselmo che fermava di notte la gente con una vecchia pistola e invece di puntarla contro l'assalito la puntava contro sé medesimo e diceva "O la borsa o la vita mia!" E siccome i fermati non capivano subito spiegava che si sarebbe ucciso se non gli davano qualche moneta. Ma non era mai riuscito a estorcere danaro ad anima viva. (*Totò* 21-22)

It is certainly strange, if not ironic that in *Parliamo tanto di me* we encounter Caifa, a failed thief that has entered into paradisiacal glory and finds himself among angels, despite his attempted crimes and the desires that motivated them. Equally ironic is the case of Anselmo, whose unorthodox methods of extortion could be seen more as a poor man's plea for life rather than a threat to it. Underlying both versions is the subtle satire so typical in Zavattini's early writings — a man who all his life wanted nothing more than to be a bandit makes it to heaven, and a man whose methods of robbery could equally be seen as a different way of begging for alms. The significance of this sketch is in found not in the alteration that it undergoes from one story to the next, but in Zavattini's propensity to refine already existing ideas.

At the beginning of *Miracolo a Milano* there are two scenes not mentioned in the letter to Bompiani: the scene where Totò watches a pot of milk boil over and run on to the floor, and the doctor's visit shortly before Signora Lolotta's death. Both are recycled versions of sketches found in Zavattini's earliest writings. The first, which we will call "Il latte bollente", was originally published sometime between 1927-30 and can be found in *Al macero*, a collection of some of Zavattini's early writings. Here Zavattini offers an amusing evaluation of children's toys, the institutions and practices that surround them, and their place in society. He discusses the economic importance of the factories that produce them with his typical tongue in cheek manner:

> Guai se si fermano, ci sono bambini nell'India, in Svezia, nel Cile che aspettano avidamente i giocattoli, e bisogna servirli, poiché il loro denaro muove tante altre ruote della società. [. . .] Non pensiamo a cose tristi e complicate [. . .] Ma perché dovrei farvi piangere? La vita è bella". (*Opere* 1104)

His sarcastic statements regarding the "importance" of the toy industry show the populist themes that are so prevalent in his later cinematic works. Essentially, the sketch is an invective against bourgeois cultural practices which are perpetuated in small things like the toys children receive and the status that comes with having the most popular brands. Inequality in toys as children makes for inequality amongst adults. He does, however, offer a solution to the problem, an inexpensive toy that stimulates creativity. It is here that we find the

original source for the "latte bollente" scene in the film.

> L'altra mattina ho chiamato i miei ragazzi in cucina a vedere il latte che usciva dalla pentola. Ero stato incaricato da mia moglie di sorvegliare la bollitura del latte, che non uscisse dalla pentola. Si divertirono un mondo: gli stridori, il fumo, i rigagnoli di liquido che si spargevano ovunque. E vedevano con me in quel candore ribollente città che si decomponevano, milioni di esseri microscopici in lotta con le tempeste, e ghiacci disciolti e altre cose che ora non ricordo.
>
> Tutto con la spesa di lire 1,30, un litro di latte. (*Opere* 1106)

The recycled version offers a look into the way in which Totò was raised, what sort of games he played, and the way in which they molded and shaped for his future role in life.

> Totò aveva occhi neri con molto bianco intorno alle pupille, era magro con il collo ed il mento un po' lunghi e non dava il minimo dispiacere a sua madre fuorché per il latte. Questo del latte era un guaio piuttosto frequente. La signora Lolotta diceva: "Guarda, ti prego, il latte che è sopra il fornello. Spengi quando comincia a bollire," e Totò lo lasciava sempre uscire dal pentolino. Accorreva la signora Lolotta che lo rimprovera con dolcezza, ma lo rimporverava, che simili distrazioni avrebbero potuto nuocergli nella vita. Totò non osava dire come stavano le cose: egli vedeva nel pentolino del latte fatti straordinari, prima cedeva la superficie bianca e calma, crespava ed era rotta da bolle di fumo, quanti crateri; miriadi di esseri liberati dalla crosta di ghiaccio salivano su per le pareti del pentolino, tra fumo e scoppi ne raggiungevano l'orlo, avrebbero invaso le terre calde, oh! hanno varcato l'orlo, si precipitano sulle regioni popolate, in breve raggiungono, sommergono la casa della signora Lolotta. La quale arrivava gridando, che già il latte colava sul pavimento. (*Totò* 8-9)

This brief episode is central to the character development of Totò who, as the hero of the fable, must be perfectly good. He is emblematic of Zavattini's view of

all that which is good in the world and therefore it is not only appropriate that he would have simple toys and games to entertain himself, it is an essental part of forming his ethos. The world Totò would go on to create would be a world of equality in all things, including toys.

The second episode is one that Zavattini lifted almost in its entirety from his short sketch "Ippocrate minore", published originally around the same time as "Il latte bollente" and is also republished in *Al macero*. Once again, as is typical of Zavattini's works, it is filled with humor, this time directed towards physicians and their idiosyncratic manners. Zavattini paints a humorous picture of various doctors who sing, steal, and almost have fistfights over differing diagnoses. The recycled scene is composed of two episodes, a few sentences describing a doctor who steals from his patients and a short paragraph about a childhood memory of a doctor's visit to his parents home.

> Pensate, infatti, a un medico che dice al malato dopo averlo ben tastato in ogni parte e auscultato: "Chiuda gli occhi e apra la bocca." Con una mano gli tiene il polso e con l'altra si mette in tasca il porta cenere d'argento che è sul comodino. [. . . . . .]
> Avevo cinque anni. A casa mia vennero tre medici per un consulto: lo zio stava molto male. Essi si raccolsero in salotto dopo aver chiuso ermeticamente l'uscio. Uno era alto e grosso, gli altri due piuttosto piccoli e magri. Udii voci concitate, mi parve anche che una sedia cadesse.
> Ecco perché da bambino pensavo che i consulti si volgevano così. "È nefrite," dice il medico alto e grosso. "Ma . . ." obiettano i medici magri e piccoli. Il medico alto e grosso si alza, si rimbocca le maniche, va vicino ai due medici piccoli e magri. "È nefrite," ripete guardandoli fissi. "È nefrite," ripetono con un filo di voce i due

medici piccoli e magri. (*Opere* 1102-03)

The humor of the scene is singular; grown, educated men still resorting to settling their differences in the same way they would have on the playground. However, underlying the author's playful poke at medical professionals there still remains the possiblitiy that if the larger of the doctors is wrong in his diagnosis then a tragedy is soon to occur. Zavattini's humor, even in this early phase of his career, is always laced with a bitter reality.

This scene finds its revision in *Totò il buono* towards the beginning of the book, immediately following the boiling milk sketch. Signora Lolotta falls ill and two physicians come and visit.

> Anzi i medici, perché erano venuti in due quella sera e si erano chiusi nella camera della malata. Totò aveva guardato dal buco della serratura: uno alto e grosso, l'altro mingherlino e piccolo. "Appendicite," disse il grosso. "Polmonite" disse il piccolo. Polmonite appendicete, polmonite appendicite, polmonite appendicite. A un tratto il medico grosso gridò: "Ho detto appendicite," e fece il gesto di tirarsi su le maniche. Allora l'altro chinò la testa balbettando: "Appendicite." La volta dopo Totò aveva guardato ancora dal buco della serratura. C'era un medico che diceva alla signora Lolotta: "Aprite la bocca e chiutede gli occhi." Essa chiudeva gli occhi e apriva la bocca, intanto il medico ne approfittava per mangiare le caramelle d'orzo che la signora Lolotta teneva sul comodino. (10)

Zavattini's humor is always a social critique. Nonetheless, the tragedy of doctor taking advantage of his patient, who is on her death bed nonetheless is rather facetious. The scene itself changes very little from the original sketches. Most

significant is the melding of two separate ideas into one. In the film, we see one doctor's visit rather than two separate and no arguement over the diagnosis is necessary, but the sleight of hand performed by the one doctor while Signora Lolotta's eyes are closed still is found in the film, though omitted in the novel. There is, however, a reminiscence of the physicians' argument found in the scene where Mobbi and the other businessman haggle over the price of the land on which the baraccopoli stands.

One final scene that deserves attention, "La gara mondiale della matematica", is hardly present in the novel, Zavattini describes it in one sentence, omitting the punchline completely. He revisits the gag, changing the characters and the context, and transplants it directly into the film, giving it more prominence than he had previously. Found originally in *Parliamo tanto di me*, "La gara mondiale della matematica" is part of a story-telling contest between two shades, Ted Mac Namara and Cesare Cadabra.[16] His final story, a tale about an international counting contest, is what eventually wins the contest for Mac Namara. "La gara della matematica" begins with a judge and several men whose purpose was to count higher than any of the other contestants. After many hours the high number finally reached one billion. At this point the contest between

[16] Cadabra was a horrible story teller who appears twice during the journey in the afterlife and he loses the contest after telling only one story, an unintelligible story about chickens and eggs. It is interesting to note that early on in his career Zavattini signed many of his columns with the name Cesare Cadabra.

the two remaining men, one of whom was Ted's father, escalated exponentially as the other contestant, Binacchi began counting billions at a time "un miliardo di miliardi di miliardi . . ." Mac Namara, not to be undone began his own series of billions.

> Il presidente Maust, pallidissimo, mormorava a mio padre, tirandolo per le falde della palandrana: 'Basta basta, le farà male.' Mio padre seguitava fieramente:
>
> ' . . . di miliardi di miliardi di miliardi di miliardi." a poco a poco la sua voce si smorzò. L'ultimo fievole di milardi gli uscì dalle labbra come un sospiro, indi si abbatté sfinito sulla sedia. Gli spettatori, in piedi, lo acclamarono freneticamente. Il principe Ottone gli si avvicinò e stava per appuntargli la medaglia sul petto quando Gianni Binacchi urlò:
>
> "Più uno!"
>
> "La folla precipitatasi nell'emiciclo portò in trionfo Gianni Binacchi. Quando tornammo a casa, mia madre ci aspettava ansiosa sulla porta. Pioveva. Il babbo appena sceso dalla diligenza, le si gettò tra le braccia singhiozzando: "Se avessi detto più due avrei vinto io. (*Opere* 56)

The modified version found in *Miracolo a Milano* takes place shortly after Totò has received the miraculous dove from his mother and has shown the crowd his newly discovered powers. Upon realizing that he could grant them whatever they wanted, the baracchesi crowd him, asking him for gold watches, furs, fine jewelry and finally, a million lira. Someone else ups the sum, asking for two, another three and so on until it's down to two and they begin a similar contest of seeing who can get the most millions out in one breath. The scene ends with one of them outdoing the other with a final "Più uno!" and the crowd congratulates

him without taking him up on their shoulders.

In the early years of his career it was not uncommon for Zavattini to recycle thoughts, episodes, incidences, even characters from older writings, not only in *Totò il buono*, also in his first book, *Parliamo tanto di me*. Evidence of this method is found in Valentino Bompiani's memory of the first time the two met in 1930.

> Quando Zavattini venne da me, non lo conoscevo neppure di nome. A vedermelo davanti grosso e timido non mi ispirava fiducia. Si era seduto e taceva, intento a strapparsi con metodo le sopracciglia. Tirò fuori dal taschino o forse dalla manica un rotoletto di ritagli. Li posò sul tavolo e vi accennava col mento come se si trattasse di ciambelle che mi invitava ad assaggiare: era il suo primo libro. [. . .] Gli proposi di scrivere un racconto per ragazzi. Mi diceva di sì, con la testa un po' storta e la bocca appuntita. Racimolò i pezzetti di carta e se ne andò. [. . .] Dopo quindici giorni tornava con un rotolo di fogli scritti a macchina. Ogni tanto balbettava. Erano gli stessi pezzi ricopiati, forse non ci aveva aggiunto neppure una parola o aveva tolto qua e là una virgola. (Bompiani 78-79)

Essentially, the newspaper cutouts pasted on sheets of paper were pieces of short stories, brief commentaries etc. that Zavattini had written earlier in his career for "Gazzetta di Parma. They were nothing more than recycled material organized in a new manner, with some touches here and there, that shaped up to form a new story. The plot for *Parliamo tanto di me* was taken from a story entitled "Viaggio a senzastagione", which was originally published in the "Gazzetta di Parma." While this brief sketch provided the storyline, the

majority of characters and scenes in *Parliamo tanto di me* were taken from columns and other articles published in various provincial newspapers and journals.[17] The novel itself is a satirical rewrite of Dante's masterpiece *La divina commedia*. Seen in this light, Za's letter to Bompiani about the origins of the stories and gags in *Totò il buono* should not be seen as revelatory, but as a confirmation of a pattern already established in Zavattini's creative process up to that point. Years later, in an interview with Lietta Tornabuoni about *Parliamo tanto di me*, Za confirms this pattern in his works.

> Nel libro ho adoperato anche materiale già scritto, le cose pubblicate qua e là, roba che avevo: per esempio, l'episodio della Gara mondiale di Matematica, vinta dopo una lotta terribile dal contendente che aggiunge "più uno" ai miliardi di miliardi contati dal rivale, episodio che ho rimaneggiato poi anche per il film *Miracolo a Milano*, è una delle primissime cose che abbia mai scritto nella mia vita.(vi)

Although Zavattini remembers that he recycled the sketch, he fails to recall that the "Gara mondiale di Matematica" was not found in the book in any recognizable form, but instead was inserted directly to the film, as though Zavattini had (un)consciously resumed the bricolage he had employed in writing the novel as he prepared the screenplay for the film.

As a text, *Totò il buono* underwent an interesting transformation. From

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[17]The articles, stories, and sketches that were reworked to create *Parliamo tanto di me* are far too numerous to list in detail here. A complete list of the recycled material, as well as the original texts can be found in Guido Conti's recent edition of Zavattini's early works: *Dite la vostra: scritti giovanili*. Parma: Guanda, 2002. 84-97.

cinematic treatment to novel to film, the work was reconceived three different times. In utilizing some of his old writings Zavattini worked in a complex manner, having his old stories told by different characters. Sometimes he changed very little and other times he would cut, edit, and meld together several stories together. The ways in which Zavattini refined, reinterpreted, and altered the story, characters, and gags from the original film subject to write the book, and eventually the film establish a pattern which could serve as a basis for his methodological approach towards writing. Zavattini himself recognized this: "Sono un gran manipolatore, e cominciai dal primo libro a fare molto lavoro di montaggio di testi. Per organizzarli, mi ci voleva una struttura di racconto elementare, pretestuosa, dilatabile, itinerante, onnicomprensiva . . ." (*Parliamo tanto di me* vi). As a manipulator of stories Zavattini's method was ideal for the cinema. He had an knack for taking stories and putting them into formats that were short, succinct and easily understood. Many of these ideas were taken from real life, many were created by his own fantasy. His strength was his ability to take a small story and tailor it to the needs of the larger narrative to which it belonged. Many of his most successful cinematic works (*I bambini ci guardano*, *Ladri di biciclette*, *L'oro di Napoli*, *La ciociara*) were all adaptations. On many occasions Zavattini relied on his literary roots for ideas that he could refine, manipulate, and recreate into new, fresh and vibrant stories. His inclination to

recycle and refine underlies his entire career, cinematic and literary.

Chapter 3

Multistoried Cinema: Episodes in De Sica's and Zavattini's Cinematic Works

In his influential article "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism" André Bazin discusses the similarities between Italian postwar cinema and American novels of the 20s and 30s. Citing in particular the similar narrative styles of Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Faulkner in comparison to Rossellini's 1946 release *Paisà*, he asserts that "the cinema of American literature has become a reality" in Italy and that the Italian cinema was "able to find the truly cinematic equivalent for the most important literary revolution of our time" (40). His discerning analysis acknowledges the characteristics of a short-story collection that are found in *Paisà* and the influence that modern American novelists had on Italian literary and cinematic culture through the translations of Faulkner and Hemingway that Vittorini and Pavese published, as well as other influences from the commedia dell'arte and fresco painting that fostered an environment in which a film like *Paisà* could not only be made, but appreciated and critically acclaimed. Rossellini's genius would give birth to an entirely new cinematic phenomenon, the episode film.

Though not well known, and often maligned by critics, episode films have

played an important artistic and economic role in Italian cinema. As with all genres, there are certain conventions, parameters, and norms that can be identified throughout the corpus of the genre[1]. The most typical of episode films followed one of two norms: a collection of several twenty to thirty minute films, each created independently by different directors; or a multi-episode film, also containing twenty to thirty minute segments, but created by a single director. In both formats, each episode is a separate narrative unto itself connected to the other segments through a common theme or cast. Rossellini took the first step in this direction with *Paisà* and within a few years after its release Cesare Zavattini began to experiment with nontraditional narrative structures. Indeed, one could say that the Rossellini created the Italian episode film, and Zavattini popularized it. Cesare Zavattini played a fundamental role in the development and diffusion of this genre. He was able to build on the model offered by Rossellini and shape it according to his own needs. Episode cinema is almost exclusively an Italian phenomenon and its cultural antecedents are found in Italian novella tradition, which finds its origins in the most celebrated collection of all, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

[1]Between 1960 and 1965 roughly 20 episode films were produced annually. A quick summary of films and contributing directors shows that nearly every Italian director of consequence was at some point involved in an episode film. Producers loved episode films because they were quick, inexpensive, and they always made money, all of which provided reasons for critics to disparage the genre.

As the first true episode film, *Paisà* was unique for its subject matter and the use of non-professional actors, but the true innovation is found in the construction of the narrative. It consisted of six episodes, each situated in war-time Italy, yet each an independent story. The film was specifically marketed to an American audience as an attempt to change prevailing opinions about Italians and their involvement in WWII. Rossellini sought to show that not all Italians were fascists in alliance with Mussolini and in turn Hitler, but that they too fought hard for their liberation from Nazi-fascist control. To accomplish this task, Rossellini traces the path of the Allied liberation from Sicily to the Po river valley in a series of episodes. Each episode is introduced by an interlude that includes a map which denotes the location of the segment. A voice-over narrator tells the story of the Allied troops as they move northward from Sicily. The interludes provide a crucial element to the construction of the film as they tie each episode to the next and create a framework for the entire film. Without them the project would have lacked narrative cohesion and been difficult for the average viewer of the day to understand. Maps and voice over narration had obviously been used in cinema prior to 1948. Robert Flaherty used similar techniques as a means of transporting his audience to the far corners of the world with his documentaries. Rossellini utilized these very well known, even traditional, cinematic devices as a means for audiences to piece together the

fragmentary nature of a multistoried film. Herein lies the genius of the film. The interludes provide the necessary framework for the creation of a cohesive narrative, fragmented though it may be. In this role the interludes cooperate with each individual episode and become a separate paratext, which when combined with the individual episodes create an integral whole. In literary culture paratextual elements would include "[titles], subtitles, intertitles, prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes, epigraphs, illustrations, blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic, or autographic" that bind the text together, thus creating a totality for a given literary work (Genette, *Paratexts* 3). A classic example is in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Imagine how the novel would have been received if it had not been entitled *Ulysses* or if the chapter titles were omitted? The interpretation of the main body of the text, or at least the strategies employed to interpret are often determined by the paratext itself. All films contain numerous paratextual elements that provide a framework for the interpretation of the film. On a cinematic level, these paratextual elements would include titles of different episodes, credits, preface titles, intertitles that indicate location or time, voice-over narratives, and, to some degree, extradiegetical music. Episode films rely on paratextual elements to create unity within the diverging storylines. These elements help create a structure for the

work and provide a frame of reference for the viewers.

The use of paratextual elements as a strategy to give significance and continuity to an episode film is in many ways parallel to the narrative structure that Boccaccio used to create the *Decameron*. First, the divisions of the novelle themselves show an intricate structure. The work is divided into ten days and each day consists of ten stories that follow the specific theme for that particular day. This temporal division, followed by a thematic subdivision, allows for the perception of unity within the individual novelle. The competing narratives make sense to the reader because they fit into a certain theme, be it wives tricking their husbands, both men and women playing tricks on each other, or the triumph of human intelligence. Introductions and conclusions serve as bookends to each day. There is also a proem and introduction to begin the work, and a grand conclusion at the end. Though not as strict in their structure as Boccaccio's work, conventions similar to those found in the *Decameron* can be seen in many episode films. On many different levels episode films, and in particular early episode films, function much like an individual day in the *Decameron*. One of the reasons that *Paisà* made sense for viewers is that, though unique, each episode is still related to the overarching theme of Italians fighting against fascism.

Zavattini was influenced by the organization that Rossellini implemented in *Paisà* and he began to write film subjects which had a similar narrative

structure. As early as 1946 (the same year *Paisà* was released) Zavattini began discussing the possibility of creating an episode film with friends and producers. In a letter to Giuseppe Marotta, his good friend and former colleague with Rizzoli, he states:

> Della vita dell'Universalia mi giungono degli echi lontani e contraddittori: chissà come stanno le cose. Io poi ti riservo una sorpresa: perché a D'Angelo [Salvo D'Angelo, Universalia Film] vorrei parlare di una cosa che colpisce di più la psicologia di un produttore. Cioè: un film su Napoli fatto di cinque episodi tratti dal tuo libro. Ciascun episodio diretto da un regista diverso. Che cosa ne dici? È un'idea? Bisogna scegliere quegli episodi che siano adatti, si capisce, per un film così. Titolo: L'oro di Napoli. Al produttore, sia D'Angelo sia un altro, può colpire prima di tutto l'idea dei cinque registi, secondo che si tratta di Napoli, terzo che gli episodi sono tratti da un libro premiato e diffuso. (Zavattini *Una, Cento* 108)

That particular project didn't fully develop until nearly a decade later when Marotta, De Sica, and Zavattini finally were able to follow through on the proposal. However, the seed had been planted. Later in 1950 he and De Sica began to plan another multi-episode project entitled *Italia mia* and although it was never filmed in its originally intended form, it would prove to be influential throughout the rest of Zavattini's career.

Italia mia was first proposed as a film that would take the viewer around the world as it was shot in various locations – a sort of travel documentary, with various segments for different nations, regions, and cities. Neither De Sica nor Zavattini had the funding that such an endeavor would have required and so the

project was quickly reduced to a more manageable national scale, where ten or twelve different cities would be highlighted. According to Zavattini, De Sica greeted the idea with much enthusiasm and the two made plans to secure funding and shoot the film. Shortly afterwards De Sica set off on his infamous trip to the United States and was unable to follow through with the commitment. Zavattini then turned to Roberto Rossellini and through a series of enthusiastic conversations, which also involved film producer Carlo Ponti, the two came to an agreement to shoot the film together as outlined by Zavattini's treatment. Unfortunately the project fizzled and nothing of substance came of it. Unable to find funding and support for *Italia mia*, Zavattini directed his creative efforts elsewhere and found other ways to experiment with this new means of cinematic narration.

In 1952 two Zavattinian episode films were released – *Amore in città* and *Siamo donne*. *Amore in città* was originally intended to be a part of a series of films that would act like monthly magazines. Each edition was to have a director/reporter that would reenact true stories featuring the people who experienced them. The idea was conceived by Zavattini in 1950 with the collaboration of Marco Ferreri and Riccardo Ghione and was to be called *Documento mensile*[2]. Many young directors collaborated in this project, including

[2]*Documento mensile* was emblematic of Zavattini's Neorealist theories. The films were essentially short documentaries lasting 3-10 minutes very similar to the news clips shown before

Fellini and Antonioni, who had both recently produced their first feature films. As a whole, the group strongly identified with the Neorealist movement and some (Lattuada, Lizzani, Antonioni) had contributed to the debates that colored the journals of the day. In retrospect, the project can be considered as an attempt to bolster the Neorealist movement, which had already seen its share of schisms and was beginning to lose momentum. Innovative methods of creating a structural unity between the various episodes were essential to the project's success. To achieve a more logical progression from one episode to the next, Zavattini employed a voice-over narrator and he also included an introduction, much like that found in the *Decameron*.

The proem to the *Decameron*, and, in particular, the introduction to the first day of storytelling create the basis for the narrative frame that Boccaccio employs to regulate the entire work. The dreadful images found in the introduction allow Boccaccio to narrate the events as a detached observer simply trying to make sense out of the chaos. He achieves his desired order by focusing on the gathering of the *brigata* in the chapel of Santa Maria Novella. As they leave the city and assume the role of second-degree narrators, their

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feature length films. As the title denotes, there was to be a monthly issue of the film magazine. The reality was that two issues were produced, the first a short directed by De Sica containing out takes from *Ladri di biciclette*, and the second the more noteworthy *Appunti su un fatto di cronaca*, an eight minute documentary on the rape of a young Roman girl by Luchino Visconti. The two documentaries were never officially released.

conversations, opinions, and commentaries form the undergirding for the structure of the work and allow Boccaccio to distance himself from the narration. The introduction and the proem provide an essential tool for interpreting the *Decameron*.

Amore in città employs a framing device similar to the introduction to the first day in the *Decameron* which provides a context for the viewers to situate the characters and their stories. The film opens with a woman at a newsstand purchasing a magazine entitled "Lo spettatore." A voice-over narrator explains the premise of the project as the woman purchases and turns the pages of the magazine, which contain still images from the film, and the names of the collaborating directors listed as reporters:

> In this film we have created a new magazine "The Film Spectator." Using film and sound instead of paper and ink, the first issue of our film magazine is called "Love in the city." It is devoted to searching out the patterns of love peculiar to a great city without fear, without taboos, seeking an intimacy with life, a closeness to reality that celebrates life itself. [. . . . .] The city might be any city, Chicago, Paris, Pittsburgh, London, but for this special issue of the "Spectator" we selected Rome, one of the world's oldest, most romantic cities, where, as in any city, love differs from love in the countryside and small towns. [. . .] love in the city is not like movie love, with beautiful women sighing over He-men, a love that can be rehearsed and revised until perfect. No, we have no such perfect love, but it is love as you and I may know it. (*Amore in città*)

The scene serves a dual purpose. First, it places the viewer in the city where all of the episodes are to take place, providing a frame of reference for

each story. Second, the narrator explains that though each episode is a story unto itself, told by a different director and with different actors, they are all united under the common theme of love in Italian society. The intertitles for each episode employ the same voice-over narrator as the camera returns to the pages of the magazine "Lo spettatore" which serve as screen credits while the narrator explains the next episode and situates it accordingly, providing each segment with its own sort of preface, much in the same way that each narrator in the *Decameron* introduces the theme for each day or story.

This first scene acts as an introduction and clearly establishes the rules of engagement for the entire film. The narrator, who is never identified, guides the viewer throughout the entire film, delegating narrative responsabilities to the characters where necessary, becoming an interviewer in one of the episodes, and even gives the reins to one of the "reporter" directors for one episode, then takes them back in transition for the next. The use of the voice-over narrator throughout the film distances the directors from the film much in the same way the narrative frame in the *Decameron* distanced Boccaccio from his work. The separate episodes meld into one film under the sway of the narrator's voice, yet each episode retains a distinct narrative style, consistent with their other works. It allows the entire project to become a film in which they collaborated, not one for which they were entirely responsible.

Shortly after the release of *Amore in città* another Zavattini project was released – *Siamo donne*. The film was based on a similar structure to that found in *Amore in città*. It was a multiple author collaboration, planned as such from the beginning. However, the film was destined to have more success because of its star power. Each director was paired with a famous actress (Ingrid Bergman and Rossellini, Anna Magnani and Visconti, etc.) and each episode received its title from the actress who starred in it. The purpose of the film was to show the reality of life for Italian film divas, and their interaction with "real" people as they attempted to be understood by a public that idolized them yet at the same time alienated them. Each episode was to be a story told by the actress, through her reenactment of the events as she recounts them. Using cinema to understand human nature was an important motif throughout each episode, hence the title, which carries with it the implicit cry for understanding – "We're women" too.

Siamo donne shares a similar framing device with a short documentary-like narration of a national competetion entitled "Quattro attrici, una speranza," which was used as a marketing campaign for the film. Hundreds of young women, each hoping to become the next star of the Italian cinema, participated in this contest. The winners (Anna Amendola and Emma Danieli) were given the opportunity to act out their stories in what became the preface to *Siamo donne*.

Just as in *Amore in città*, the preface to *Siamo donne* establishes the rules by

which each episode will function and plays with the concept of reality and its representation. Unlike *Amore in città*, there is no external voice-over narrator to give the preface. Each episode, including the preface, is narrated by the actresses who are telling their stories. The preface begins with Anna Amendola leaving her mother's home fearing that she'll never be able to return again because of her choice to pursue acting as a career. The camera soon takes her perspective as we see point of view shots from the backseat of a taxi as it approaches the set where crowds of young women have gathered for the competition. As it pans through the crowd, the camera rests on a young woman trying to find her way throught the crush. She sees a stairway that looks as if it might lead somewhere but upon further examination it is only part of an old set, thus highlighting the difficulty in determining reality from fiction, but more importantly showing the highly conscious desire to portray an accurate reality. After numerous selections and interviews four finalists are chosen and shadowed as they make their way through a final series of interviews and screen tests. At the end of the day the two winners (Amendola and Danieli) are announced to the public in a live broadcast. The camera focuses a screen, wherein the credits for the first episode begin playing, thus delineating the end of the prefatorial episode, depicting the manner in which potential stars are selected and marketed. The camera focuses on this image and moves directly to the remaining four episodes, each of which is

introduced by a unique set of intertitles. These intertitles not only delineate the beginning and the end of each episode, they act as a means of transition, and give the entire project unity. Each episode (except for Ingrid Bergman's) begins with a voice-over narrative by the starring actress, which acts as an introduction to the episode and places the actress in the role of narrator, much in the same way a character from a frame tale would. They give background to the story, and offer personal opinions of it. These brief voice-overs can be considered an extension of the intertitles (at least in purpose).

The Ingrid Bergman episode is singular, not only for its humor, but also for the means it uses to accomplish the narration of events. Instead of a voice-over introduction the segment begins with Bergman in a garden speaking directly to the camera. After a short description of her surroundings she begins to tell her story as the camera fades. Throughout the episode Bergman periodically directs her attention to the camera to narrate her thoughts and other pertinent facts regarding the story, which is essentially her struggle with one of the chickens in the villa. However, at the conclusion of the story (which includes memorable footage of Bergman chasing the chicken around the courtyard) we return to the original image of Bergman, standing in a garden, facing the camera, telling us how stupid the story really was. As she begins and ends her account of her duel with a chicken, we can easily imagine Bergman as a modern

day Fiammetta, Pampinea, or Elissa. By addressing the audience directly, her unique presentation enriches the narrative frame and further aids the viewers in constructing their interpretation of the film, which hopefully will lead them to believe that film divas are real people with real stories to tell.

Zavattini's use of paratextual elements similar to those found in the *Decameron* is not the only way in which *Amore in città* and *Siamo donne* transmit their debt to Boccaccio. Another can be found in the meaning of the word novella itself.

> The word novella is concrete, it does not mean story, a fiction of the imagination, a poetic invention, but news, actual news reports of events which really took place, anecdotes in the life of rich, powerful and famous persons, information received from distant places. [. . .] The events in Boccaccio's novelle do not take place in a misty and legendary atmosphere, among vaguely defined and shadowy characters, virtuous knights and noble maidens, driven by honourable motives, as in the stories which were written about the same time in other parts of feudal Europe. There are real people in the Italian stories, merchants, monks, artisans, shopkeepers, and princes, human beings of solid flesh and sound appetites, who speak the quick and colorful dialects of the market place. (Barzini 151)

The *Decameron* was revolutionary, not only because of its complex structure, but also because of its thematic content. It showed society in transition from the lofty presence of God (as found in Dante) to a more humanistic view of the world. The *Decameron* was created in the aftermath of medieval Europe's most defining moment. The devastation of the plague reached all levels of society and to a

certain extent changed the way in which people approached life. Boccaccio illustrates how the paradigms of societal structure were changing, and along with it the means used to narrate it. Moreover, the *Decameron* established the novella tradition, wherein "there was a certain insistence on verisimilitude in the depiction of reality. [. . .] In his conclusion (Boccaccio) concedes that the collection might have been better had some of the tales been omitted, but this he says would have rendered unfaithful his account of an actual event" (Clements & Gibaldi 17-18).

It can be argued that Zavattini and many other artists found themselves in a similar situation in the wake of the devastation of WWII. Society was changing and with it the means of representing it. Zavattini looked to his literary and cultural history to find adequate models for narrating the events of his time. The novella has remained a constant in Italian culture, and its relationship to news and reportage is an important key to understanding Zavattini's promotion of the episode format in cinema.

As a point of contact between literature and cinema within the works of De Sica and Zavattini, the structural elements of an episode film are but one example of the ways in which the two created. Another way in which De Sica and Zavattini furthered the narrative model of the episode film is found in the adaptation and reutilization of novella collections, most notably Giuseppe

Marotta's *L'oro di Napoli*, which presents important transitional elements in episode cinema.

Between De Sica's disappointing trip to America and the other films they created during the first half of the decade, it wasn't until 1954 that Zavattini and De Sica actually collaborated in the production of an episode film. *L'oro di Napoli* was based on Giuseppe Marotta's eponymous book, which was originally published in 1947 by Bompiani.

Born in 1902 to a Neapolitan lawyer, Marotta was, for most of his career, an outsider to Italian literary circles. Upon the death of his father he was unable to afford a proper education and was forced to take odd jobs to support himself, his widowed mother and two sisters. In his early twenties he moved to Milan, where he lived and worked until he returned to Naples in the 1950's. He arrived in Milan with hopes of becoming an author, but instead found work as a magazine editor for Mondadori for a short period and then was taken on in a similar position with the Rizzoli publishing house, where he met and became friends with Cesare Zavattini. After speaking with many publishers and many disappointments he finally published his first novel, *Tutte a me* in 1932. Marotta really had two careers, pre 1946 and post 1946. His association with illustrated magazines, his city of origin, and his lack of a traditional academic background stigmatized the few works he did publish before World War II. He wrote for

Cinema illustrazione, *Guerrin Meschino*, and other regional and national magazines during this period, and did freelance.

He did not have much self confidence, or rather, he did not have much confidence that his work would be accepted by Italian literary circles, and it wasn't at least until the publication of *L'oro di Napoli* in 1947 that his works began to enjoy some approval and popularity. Carlo Bo describes the disdainful attitudes and criticisms towards Marotta:

> Marotta veniva da un territorio infetto, da un "ghetto" dal punto di vista della letteratura ufficiale: era irregolare e, come se non bastasse, aveva dato tutto negli anni della formazione, meglio aveva buttato indiscriminatamente tutta la fortuna della sua fantasia, la richezza dei suoi umori, senza calcoli, senza idee di risparmi, insomma senza alcun interesse. (Quoted in *Opere di Giuseppe Marotta* 1)

The scorn that critics dealt Marotta early in his career stung and left a bitterness in his attitude towards the literary establishment that lasted until his death in 1963 and, some feel, obscured what was the most successful period of his career.

Despite the stigmas attached to his name, Marotta found success, and became known as one of the better Neapolitan writers of his time. He often wrote autobiographical stories. As the narrator, he is constantly present, often referring to himself, offering his opinions in the first person and, particularly in the case of *L'oro di Napoli*, he introduce each story himself, explaining how he came upon it (often it came from his own experiences or from those of his

neighbors, friends, and 'compaesani'). His stories are about everyday Neapolitans. They come straight from the "bassi", the popular traditions and festivals, the local legends and happenings. Given his background as a newsman, his stories could just as easily be found in the local newspaper as in a literary magazine.

L'oro di Napoli was his first major success. The project was comprised of thirty short stories, most of which had been published previously in various magazines and newspapers. As the title suggests, the purpose of the book is to present a variety of different characters, stories, and anecdotes, whose sum will equal the "gold" that is Naples. However, Marotta's vision of the real treasure of Naples comes at the end of the story of don Ignazio Ziviello, a hunchback who frittered away his inheritance, became a street organ player, nearly went mad when his wife and child were killed in an automobile accident, then became a fireworks man, a porter, and finally a sought after guitar player/instructor whose small basement apartment was destroyed in the war. Don Ignazio carried on and set up shop with a few stools and a piece of corrugated tin as a roof. In this example Marotta showed us his opinion of the Neapolitan people and lifestyle.

> Ecco una città e un popolo ferocemente percossi dalle sventure della guerra, e sul conto dei quali si pronunzia spesso la parola "eroismo". Questo termine marmoreo io lo ritengo tuttavia superato, agli effetti umani, dalle caratteristiche di un qualsiasi don Ignazio.
> La possibilità di rialzarsi dopo ogni caduta; una remota ereditaria

> intelligente superiore pazienza. Arrotoliamo i secoli, i millenni, e forse ne troveremo l'origine nelle convulsioni del suolo, negli sbuffi di mortifero vapore che erompevano improvvisi, nelle onde che scavalcavano le colline, in tutti i pericoli che qui insidiavano la vita umana; è l'oro di Napoli questa pazienza. (21)

The collection of stories attests to Marotta's intimate relationship with Naples, its inhabitants, and its traditions.

In considering the cinematic version of *L'oro di Napoli* a few pertinent issues come up. First, the selection of a literary text like *L'oro di Napoli* is indeed a peculiar choice. It was not uncommon for Italian directors to adapt short stories to the screen, directors and screenwriters had already done so[3]. Why would Zavattini and De Sica choose to adapt Marotta's work when other, more well known, and more prestigious models (such as the *Decameron*) existed? Clearly the duo had no qualms about adapting a literary work, as they had previously done so. There was definitely no lack of work as the two delayed projects in order to film Marotta's work. Zavattini and Marotta had been friends since their days as magazine writers in pre-war Milan and while their friendship certainly contributed to their collaboration in this project it is unlikely that the project was begun for a friend's sake. Rather, the reasons for adapting *L'oro di Napoli* lie in the subject and the content of Marotta's collection.

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[3]There are few examples of adaptations of short story collections in Italian cinema prior to *L'oro di Napoli*. Gennaro Righelli's 1911 "Il Decamerone" is the only known adaptation of Boccaccio's eponymous work.

As a collection of short stories, themes and content found in *L'oro di Napoli* are very close to the style that Zavattini employed during the height of his literary career some fifteen years earlier. These same themes of human solidarity, poverty, and understanding the human psyche, are found throughout Zavattini's Neorealist works as well. This is not to say that Marotta was in any way indebted to Zavattini, or that there was any commanding degree of influence between the two writers. Simply put, the tenets of Marotta's *L'oro di Napoli* and those that Zavattini sustained as one of the central figures in the Neorealist movement were similar. As has been discussed, Zavattini wanted to create this film nearly a decade earlier just as the Neorealist movement was being born. Had funding come through in 1946 when the project was initially discussed, it is possible that *L'oro di Napoli* would have been mentioned in the same breath as *Ladri di biciclette*, *Sciuscià*, *Roma città aperta*, and other canonical Neorealist films.

These social themes are not the only reasons De Sica and Zavattini were attracted to Marotta's text. Marotta was always seen as a humorist first, and a writer second. Much of this has to do with his background in humorist magazines (something he shared with Zavattini). There is a definite tendency towards a comical, satirical representation of Naples and its inhabitants that runs throughout the pages of *L'oro di Napoli*. Marotta does not deride his fellow

Neapolitans, but he does not shy away from empasizing humorous situations and characters and the ironies that can abound in life. Furthermore, the autobiographical nature of the work gives it a freshness, a feeling of contemporary, yet traditional Naples that is expressed in very real terms. Marotta did not claim to belong to the Neorealist literary movement, nor have critics tried to assign him such a label, yet his focus on the Neapolitans of the "bassi", the poor neighborhoods, the reality of living in every-day Naples is undoubtedly what attracted the Zavattini-De Sica duo to his work. Simply put, Zavattini was attracted to exploring reality and truth in as many different contexts as possible and Marotta's work allowed him to do so in a Neapolitan context[4].

If Carlo Bo's statement that Giuseppe Marotta was an author of reduction, then it is safe to say that Zavattini's screenplay was a reduction as well. Zavattini adapted five short stories from the original collection, yet in the adaptation of each segment, he brought elements from other stories that added depth to the narrative, and played to the strengths of the actors accordingly[5]. For example, don Saverio from Marotta's "Trent'anni, diconsi trenta" was a mandolin maker

[4]Zavattini took great care to note that in his adaptation of Marotta's work he was not attempting to complete an in-depth analysis of Naples that was in accordance with his theories of Neorealism. The topic interested him but his work with *L'oro di Napoli* would not be a "svisceramento della realtà" as he had sought to accomplish with other film(namely *Umberto D.*).

[5]For another example of this method of adaptation through bricolage, see the analysis of *Miracolo a Milano* in Chapter II.

and in Zavattini's "Il guappo" is played by Totò and is portrayed as a *pazzariello* (a cross between a drum major for a small band and a clown who would perform specially written songs for the openings of just about any new business, but particularly for bakeries and pasta shops). One might say that a *pazzariello* was common enough in Neapolitan life that Zavattini changed the profession to show a more colorful side of the city, or to showcase Totò's talents (who was known for his musical comedy from his career in the theater). Both options are practical approaches, but it is key to realize that Marotta's work dedicates an entire story to don Peppino Cammarota, *pazzariello* of the Via Vicaria Vecchia. Zavattini's version of the story actually combines elements from two other stories ("Il guappo", and "Porta Capuana") with the plot of "Trent'anni, diconsi trenta" to create the episode "Il guappo". The combination of various stories accommodates the integration of a greater variety of elements from the book in the film.

Zavattini's "Pizze a credito" is a combination of the plot of "Gente nel vicolo", where the wife of a pizzaiolo (played by Sofia Loren) accidently forgets her sapphire ring on her lover's nightstand and then claims that it was lost in the pizza dough she kneaded for her husband later that morning, and "La morte a Napoli" which describes in detail the common Neapolitan reaction to the death of a loved one (a theatrical suicide attempt thwarted by the heroic efforts of a

relative). For a comic effect, Zavattini's script places Don Peppino, who loses his wife, as one of the customers who might have unknowingly received the ring in one of the pizzas that Don Rosario sold him. Don Rosario and Donna Sofia visit him to try and retrieve the ring shortly after his wife's passing. While they are there he attempts to kill himself several times and the practices described by Marotta are grafted into the plot of the lost ring. Finally, the last episode melds the characters of Don Vito from "Il professore" and Don Pasquale Esposito from "Lo sberleffo", expert administrator of *la pernacchia* (an insult equivalent to blowing a raspberry) to create a unique episode. The "reductions" Zavattini introduces fit the tone of the original short stories and in so doing he expands the amount of material taken from Marotta's collection, thus allowing those familiar with the literary version of *L'oro di Napoli* to put together the various characters and perhaps take more delight in the adaptation, while those who are not familiar with Marotta's work are able to see more of the "gold" that makes up Naples.

The other three episodes consist of two episodes that are more or less faithful to Marotta's original text ("I giocatori" from the eponymous novella, and "Teresa" from "Personaggi in busta chiusa"), and an original episode entitled "Il funeralino." This brief segment follows the funeral procession of a mother's small child, was shown at Cannes, but it was cut afterwards and was not shown

with the film during its run in theaters. Only recently a new version including all six original episodes was released on VHS and DVD[6]. Of the three episodes "I giocatori" merits closer analysis.

The original, literary version is somewhat different from its cinematic rendition and Marotta is clearly evident as the narrator to "I giocatori." The written text begins and ends with a brief paragraph where the narrator engages the reader directly. Such a technique is commonplace throughout the collection. The narrator begins with the words "Questo non significa nemmeno raccontare" (*L'oro* 159). His recognition of the absence of a storyline is suggestive because there is only a slight story, no real plot, no conflict, no resolution. Marotta presents the story of a count who, because of his compulsive gambling, has lost all right to his inheritance and must marry to have access to his patrimony. He marries a woman who he thought was weak, one that he could control in order to support his addiction to gambling. Upon consummating the hasty marriage he immediately returns to the playing tables with his new wife at his side and

[6]Episode films were always subject to revision, and often one or more episodes were omitted in the public release. Episodes were dropped for various reasons, including marketing, length, censorship, etc. In the case of *L'oro di Napoli* the "Funeralino" segment was dropped entirely and "Il professore" was dropped from the international release. Many criticized De Sica for giving in to Carlo Ponti and accused him of a lack of integrity. However, it is important to realize that this was a natural fact surrounding episode cinema. The filming of an episode did not guarantee its inclusion, nor did it guarantee its use for its original purpose. Cut episodes were similar to scenes cut at editing. Sometimes they didn't work, or made the film too long. Episodes created for an episode film were unique in that they were often reutilized in other productions. At times entirely new films were created by combining episodes from different projects and re-releasing them as a new film.

promptly loses everything that the executor to his father's estate had given the newlyweds. Without leaving the table he sends his new bride to request more funds from the lawyer, whereupon she learns of the count's true designs in marrying her. The executor advises her to keep her husband on a short leash in order to avoid an imminent bankruptcy. The new countess takes the advice seriously and the count is no better off despite his greedy machinations. In his old age he forces the son of his porter to play cards with him every day, which in some way satisfies his compulsion to gamble. Marotta gives a scarse, yet poignant description of the usual game between the two, and it is here that the genius of De Sica and Zavattini shines as the majority of their interpretation of the story rests on the actual card game between the two.

The cinematic version of this story deals only with the card game and the brief moments that precede it. The countess plays a minimal role, the lawyer is nonexistent. De Sica is brilliant in the role of the count, and the episode is perhaps the most successful, if not most memorable, of the entire group. Most of the action is spent on the details of the card game, "Scopa a sette". The two players go back and forth with the young boy winning nearly all of the points. When the incredulous count asks him where he gets all his luck, the young boy responds "Le carte sanno dove devono andare." This witty response infuriates the count and the card game ends shortly thereafter as the count throws a bit of a

tantrum, flings the cards into the boy's lap, and stomps off cursing the entire way as he ascends up to his stately apartments in the palace. Whereas Marotta's original story focuses almost exclusively on the count and his vices, only hinting at the depressing circumstances of the boy, the cinematic version is markedly equal in its treatment of both the count and the boy. Care is taken to ensure that both characters are properly developed, and the final images of the episode succeed in communicating that hint of bitterness that haunts Marotta's original.

One final aspect of *L'oro di Napoli*, and perhaps the most crucial to our discussion, rests in the status of the adaptation as an epitext to the original. In his work *Paratexts*, Genette defines the epitext as:

> Any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space. The location of the epitext is therefore anywhere outside the book – but of course nothing precludes its later admission to the peritext. [. . . . . .] Anywhere outside the book may be, for example, newspapers and magazines, radio or television programs, lectures and colloquia, all public performances [. . .] Anywhere outside the book may also be the statements contained in an author's correspondence or journal, perhaps intended for later publication, either anthumous, or posthumous. (*Paratexts* 344)

Applying Genette's definition of the epitext to *L'oro di Napoli* is not to say that any cinematic adaptation can be considered as an epitext simply because it exists, outside of the literary text, and that it was produced after the original publication of the work. *L'oro di Napoli* is particular in that there was very close collaboration

between Marotta, Zavattini, and De Sica during its production. Genette divides the epitext into four different categories: the publisher's epitext, semiofficial allographic epitext, the public authorial epitext, and the private authorial epitext. Of these categories, the one that is most applicable to our study is the semiofficial allographic epitext, which is (as Genette defines it) more or less a review, or critical article that is "remote controlled" by authorial instructions that the public is not in a position to know about, except from some posthumous disclosure" (*Paratexts* 348). Furthermore, Genette states in the conclusion that his study was never meant to be complete, or all-encompasing. As if to encourage further study of paratexts, he outlines three specific areas which he deemed worthy of study but that proved to be too difficult or too impractical to expound upon at that particular time. The area that is of most importance to the present discussion is that of translation. Genette singles out translations that are done by bilingual authors (such as Samuel Beckett) or a translation that "is more or less revised or checked by the author" (*Paratexts* 405). If a translation is a sort of epitext, an interpretation of the original text which comes after the fact, then it follows that the adaptation of a literary work to a cinematic work can function as a form of epitext, which is an essential component to paratexts. This is not to suggest that adaptation is as simple as translating grammatical structures from one language to another (a complicated task in and of itself), but in a sense

adaptation can be viewed as the translation of ideas and concepts from one signifying system (the written word) to another (the visuality and sonority of the cinema). In this sense the cinematic version of *L'oro di Napoli* is an excellent example of a cinematic adaptation working as an epitext to the literary original.

Notwithstanding the obvious parallels between a critical review of a work sanctioned and approved by the author and a reinterpretion (likewise approved by the author) of a literary work to film, our application of this definition of course must be modified to accommodate a cinematic adaptation of a literary work. Otherwise, any adaptation could simply be seen as a paratextual element and the term would lose meaning. This concept, though not essential to the present argument, merits discussion, precisely because the distinction between epitext, peritext, and text as articulated by Genette is not precise enough to state with certainty where the epitext ends. One could argue (depending on the terms of the contract between author and screenwriter) that any time an author allows a work to be adapted to the cinema that their contract authorizes a third party to produce that particular "edition" of his work. Therefore, the cinematic version becomes a reinterpretation of the original, and thus it is a paratextual element to the original. Such a definition, broadly applied, could become problematic as some authors have given permission to the adaptation and then decried the results as having nothing to do with the original. Luigi Bartolini in *Ladri di*

biciclette and Giorgio Bassani with *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* are two poignant examples. A more conservative path would be to consider adaptations in which the author actively collaborated, but did not take full credit for the screenplay and the direction. *L'oro di Napoli* fits nicely into this category because not only did Marotta's name appear in the credits as a screenwriter (often a perfunctory statement in honor of the original author who was likely consulted for the project, but was not an active participant in the actual screenwriting) but his collaboration was documented through several interviews that the three men responsible for the film (De Sica, Zavattini and Marotta) gave shortly before the film was released.

Late in 1953, as a part of the publicity campaign leading up to its release, Marotta, Zavattini, and De Sica all contributed to an article that appeared in Aristarco's influential journal *Cinema nuovo*. Each discussed the creation of the film and their role as a collaborator on the project. Marotta discussed his apprehension in participating in the writing of the screenplay. He feared that as the original author he could possibly "nuocere alla elaborazione di quella che, a mio parere, deve essere un'opera a sé, libera, con un carattere inconfondabile" ("Carnet" 624). He also discussed the difficult choices that were made with regards to which stories to choose and that the difficult nature of the work was facilitated by the affinities of thought and philosophy that he and Zavattini

shared. Ultimately, the stories with more of a factual nature were chosen and, where possible or necessary, integrated with others to allow for the variance in tone and color that characterizes the literary work. De Sica's thoughts on the film were similar, and he hoped that the film respected the spirit of Marotta's work. Zavattini's comments were typical, especially for that period, when his ideas and theories about cinema were being tested and challenged with each film he made. Hence his caveat stating that it was not his intention to make a film "con una Napoli Neorealistica, studiata e analizzata nei suoi problemi attuali" ("Carnet" 625). For Zavattini the major concern with the film was how to best "translate" Marotta's work to the screen and he lists the numerous ways in which the team could have adapted the short stories. In the end he chose what was the most reasonable path by reconciling the needs of the literary medium with those of the cinematic medium and with the talents and strengths of the actors, specifically Totò and Silvana Mangano. His use of the term "translate" is significant and shows his deference to Marotta and his work, both of which he esteemed greatly. Such language is not used to describe any of his prior literary adaptations, nor in any of his theoretical works when discussing the relationship between literature and film. Clearly, his respect for the work and its author, whom De Sica described as "il più accanito difensore dei suoi racconti" is a sign of the influence that Marotta had in the writing process ("Carnet" 623).

Marotta was very careful to state his role in the adaptation of *L'oro di Napoli* was limited. He gave the majority of the credit for the screenplay to Zavattini and claimed as his contribution "le parti dialogate e per certe presumibilità di atti e di gesti dei personaggi" ("Carnet" 624). However, this statement is somewhat difficult to judge. If we take it at face value then we accept that he only helped create the dialogue and some of the actor's gestures. This is possible, yet all three collaborators affirm that Marotta was with the project from beginning to end. Zavattini describes in detail a preparatory trip to Naples with Marotta as his guide. The two visited the *Mater Dei* neighborhood where Marotta grew up and where the majority of the stories found in *L'oro di Napoli* were set. Furthermore, Marotta acknowledges to have participated in revisions during shooting ("Carnet" 624). It is evident that Marotta's collaboration was much more extensive than he let on in his "initial" statement. It seems that his authorial presence (both on a physical and ideological level) sanctioned the cinematic product and caused the film to act in dialogue with the original, thus creating an extension of the literary work, not simply an analogous transposition, or an interpretation à la Zavattini. It is in this dialogue that the cinematic version of *L'oro di Napoli* becomes an epitext of the original. While Marotta's collaboration with Zavattini and De Sica did not produce a critical response to his work, it does offer a means for the viewer to interpret the original

based on the selection of the stories adapted and the changes made to characters and story lines.

In their next multi-story film adventure De Sica and Zavattini participated in what could be called the episode film par excellence – *Boccaccio '70*. The film was originally supposed to be entitled *Boccaccio '61*, but because of another film released shortly before (Jan Lenica's Fiat-sponsored *Italia '61*) the name was changed in order to avoid the appearance of any sort of ironic relationship between the two. Originally Zavattini wanted to create ten stories in a Boccaccesque style, that is, joyous, free, tipically Italian, which would take place in the ten most famous Italian cities, Turin, Milan, Venice, Trieste, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Naples, and Palermo. He wanted to use a different director for each segment: De Sica, Antonioni, Blasetti, De Santis, Fellini, Lattuada, Monicelli, Rossellini, Soldati, and Visconti. The proposal carries strong echoes from his failed project *Italia mia*, an idea that Zavattini would periodically pitch to producers for many years. Carlo Ponti drastically cut down the original plan to four episodes with Monicelli, De Sica, Visconti, and Fellini as the directors. Each was given free range for the project, enabling them to choose the subject, cast, and crew. De Sica chose Sofia Loren as his lead and Fellini chose Anita Eckberg. Both director/actress pairs had recently completed the highly successful films *La ciociara* and *La dolce vita* and were at the pinnacle of their careers. After searching

for several months, Monicelli finally decided on the inexperienced Marisa Solinas and Visconti chose to use a young but experienced German actress, Romy Schneider. All four actresses were known for their sexual appeal; Eckberg and Loren having already become established sex symbols with earlier roles, and Schneider and Solinas would, to a lesser degree, become international divas in their own right.

The film uses minimal paratextual elements with no prologue or preface, and brief intertitles consisting of the name of the next episode, the director and perhaps an actor or two shown upon what appears to be the proscenium of an ornate theater. However, at this point in episode cinema history there was little need for elaborate framing devices. The pattern had been established long beforehand with other films. Audiences had become accustomed to the unification of different storylines with minimal explanation. If anything, the intertitles in *Boccaccio '70* were much more elaborate than was necessary, showing a bit of the extravagance that could be afforded Italy's most famous directors. Many episode films (*L'oro di Napoli* included) had much simpler titles.

The title *Boccaccio '70* requires interpretation. Despite Ponti's gutting of the original proposal the title was kept. The direct reference to Boccaccio (and consequently the *Decameron*) draws attention to a perceived relationship between the two and gives the film the perhaps undeserved status of a hypertext to the

medieval original. As such the film is a complex combination of proximization and amplification in the Genettian sense. It is an amplification because it expands on the original novelle that Boccaccio wrote by offering new stories in the tradition of the originals, thus extending their thematics. By the same token it functions as a proximization of the original in that it places each episode in a contemporary context, which brings it closer to the audience, both chronologically and culturally.

If the act of proximization, as Genette states, "transposes the diegisis of its hypotext to bring it up to date and closer to its own audience" then *Boccaccio '70* poses a few questions about its status as a transposition (*Palimpsests* 4). There is no direct transposition of a Boccaccian tale from the *Decameron* found in any of the four episodes. But this is beside the point, for neither Zavattini nor Ponti ever intended to produce a cinematic adaptation of the *Decameron* (although De Sica and Zavattini did discuss the possibility of transposing the novella "Andrea da Perugia" into a modern context). Rather than situate several Boccaccian tales into a modern context, Zavattini's original idea was to allow each director to appropriate one or more themes from the medieval collection and to then transpose that particular theme into a modern context. The resulting transposition then becomes an amplification of the traditional motif, stylistics, etc. that it seeks to transpose.

That the project was originally conceived as a thematic extension and a stylistic expansion of the *Decameron* is clear. Documents and letters regarding the early phases of production clearly denote the connection between the two works. The title itself informs viewers as to how the contents of the film should be interpreted. However, with the exception of De Sica's "La riffa" there are few affinities between *Boccaccio '70* and the Boccaccio of medieval Florence. Fellini's "Le tentazioni del Dott. Antonio", can be interpreted as anticlerical (at a stretch) but only because Fellini used it as a means to get back at the pro Catholic reviewers who accused him of gross immorality in *La dolce vita*. Even so, there is very little in the episode that resembles a tale from the *Decameron*. Dr. Antonio Malaguta is a man obsessed with correcting society's moral shortcomings who is driven mad by an erotic advertisement for milk on a billboard outside his apartment building. Anita Eckberg is the model in the advertisement and day after day she stares at him with her low cut dress and seductive smile. Eventually his obsession with the advertisement and his inability to overcome his temptations cause him to lose touch with reality. He begins speaking to the billboard and then finally one night, in a dream-like sequence Dr. Antonio goes out to the billboard to try and exorcize the evil presence he feels resides in the image, and instead of mastering his weakness his weakness masters him as a giant Anita Eckberg steps out of the billboard and into real life where she toys

with Dr. Antonio, who at daybreak is taken away in an ambulance. Fellini worked for months on the episode, causing delays in the release of the project, and when he finally finished he had a film that was nearly 90 minutes long, a far cry from the brevity proposed by Zavattini. Carlo Ponti was able to edit out enough to get it down to a usable length. It is arguable that the only reason Fellini's episode was even included in the project was to reap the inevitable windfall in box office returns that would come with his name on the ticket.

Monicelli's "Renzo e Luciana" is an excellent proximization of an old tale, though not one made famous by Boccaccio. As indicated by the title, the episode is a brief retelling of Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, whose main characters, Renzo and Lucia, were prohibited from marrying by the local feudal lord, don Rodrigo. The novel is widely recognized as one of the most successeful epics in Italian literature and Monicelli does a fine job in transposing some of the difficulties that the original lovers faced into a modern Milanese context. Unfortunately, the episode was cut from the international release but recent editions have rightfully included it in the project. However, as beautiful and artistic as "Renzo e Luciana" is, it still contains no reference, direct or indirect, to Boccaccio.

Luchino Visconti's "Il lavoro" is a tightly choreographed story about a young noble couple in Milan. Count Ottavio has been caught in a scandal of

highly paid prostitutes. The reaction of his young German wife is singular, no tragedy, no divorce, the marriage will last, but on one condition: the back purchase of all conjugal sexual favors beginning with the honeymoon. From then on, if the young count desires sexual pleasures from his wife he must pay her in advance, just as he had in the past with the prostitutes he patronized. Visconti's direction is admirable. The sets are magnificiently detailed (a common trait of all Visconti films) and the actors are staged as though they were chess pieces in a unique battle of will and wit. The film is one of Visconti's best works, and yet despite the virtuosity he shows in his set design and cinematography, the episode leaves its relationship with Boccaccio unexplained and unclear. There is no novella on which Visconti bases the episode that leaves the viewer wondering if there could be some direct thematic relationship between the two. A first impression could relate it to the seventh day of the *Decameron* where women play tricks on men, however this association doesn't quite correspond to the thematics of "Il lavoro," for there is no trickery involved. Pupe, played by Romy Schneider, does nothing more than seduce her husband and then demand payment for all sexual favors. Rather the initial inspiration came from a short story by Maupassant entitled *A bord du lit*.

De Sica and Zavattini present a humorous episode with "La riffa," where a secret raffle is held during a festival in the rural town of Lugo. The prize is a

night of passion with Zoe (played by Sophia Loren), a voluptuous girl who runs a carnival shooting gallery. Zoe has agreed to the game in order to help her sister Vilma make ends meet. Vilma is not only pregnant, but her tax problems threaten the loss of the shooting gallery carnival booth. Zoe's ample curves and natural beauty prove a far better way to make money. The men of the town eagerly await the outcome of the raffle, and promise one another that whoever wins will share all the erotic details of his romp with the girl. Meanwhile, Zoe falls for a rugged local cowboy who saves her from a rampaging bull. When the raffle is won by a meek sacristan named Cuspet Formini, the cowboy turns jealous and hijacks the trailer in which Zoe is to make the shy little man's victory official.

As was common for Zavattini's subjects, the original idea for the episode came from a similar event that happened in Trieste, where a barkeeper was offering herself as the prize in a weekly raffle. Zavattini had seen the news in the paper and decided that it would make a fine subject. A comparison between the episode "Caterina" in *Amore in città* and "La riffa" from *Boccaccio '70* is in order as both are based on actual events. Despite the difference in the time period ("La riffa" was made in a period when Neorealism as a valid movement was decidedly dead, and "Caterina" was filmed at the movement's height) both have that typical realist look and flair that is inherent in every De Sica and Zavattini

production. Of all the episodes in *Boccaccio '70*, "La riffa" is perhaps the most indebted to the *Decameron*, not because of the subject but because of the style of the episode itself. Taking the story from an actual event was something that Boccaccio claimed to do. A clever linguistic balance is found in the dialogue of the characters, who all speak in dialect enough that the feel of Lugo is captured, but not so much that the audience can't understand their exchanges. The story is simple, yet highly entertaining and could be found in the *Decameron*, but as for the inclusion of the other three episodes the question remains: Where is the justification in the title of the film? The answer, quite simply, must lie in the constant explicit references to sex and sexual relationships made in each episode, throughout the entire film. Ultimately the relationship between *Boccaccio '70* and the *Decameron* can be traced to the manner in which both works challenged traditional attitudes and practices regarding sex.

When compared to his precursors writing in the vernacular, Boccaccio's portrayal of love broke from the literary tradition established by Dante and Petrarca, both of whom condemned the natural sexual drive and extolled the eternal, spiritual, even ethereal nature of love, rather than its carnal, sexual and decidely earthy nature. Sex, as it is portrayed in the *Decameron*, is in direct contrast to the teachings of the Church, canonical law, and even civic law. Adultery and fornication were considered serious offenses with punishments

that ranged from paying fines to death, depending on the circumstances[7]. Bocaccio counters the futility of restraining sexual desires by presenting fornicators, adulterers, lecherous priests, and lustful nuns that not only gratify their sexual urges but receive no punishment for doing so. The underlying theme of the work is to embrace humanity and all of the pleasures that come with it.

The uniting theme for *Boccaccio '70* was to create episodes that would challenge society's attitudes regarding sex and its aversion to it. Each portrays various relationships from a young, newlywed couple seeking a place of their own to consummate their relationship, to sex being sold in a raffle. For many Italians, the *Decameron* is the erotic text par excellence. It holds such a particular place in Italian culture in that it was originally a sophisticated collection of lowbrow stories that was appropriated by the middle class and exalted to the status of high culture, yet its bawdy nature remained the same despite many attempts to censor it. What Zavattini accomplished with *Boccaccio '70* was to bring the *Decameron* back to a medium in which the people could once again enjoy its free-spirited stories. As a film, it challenges the simple and ever so common moralism that abounded (and to a certain extent still does today) in

[7]For a detailed analysis of the regulation of sex in the Middle Ages see James A. Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law." *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, eds. (New York: Garland, 1996) 33-50.

Italian society, much in the same way that Boccaccio did in the 14th century.

To conclude, given Zavattini's positions on the role of the story in a film it is only natural that he should favor a narrative structure that offered a multifaceted approach to a single topic. As one of the major proponents of Neorealism, Zavattini advocated not the absence of storylines but rather their reorientation. He hoped that one day cinema would be able to create without the imposition and artificiality of a screenwriter or intervention from an outside author, but that it would take its marching orders from reality rather than the conventions of a structured plot. He came as close as one could to this with *Amore in città* and *Siamo donne*. In his search to narrate the reality of his time, Zavattini looked to his literary and cultural history to find adequate models. The novella has remained a constant in Italian culture, taking on various forms in different media. It is only natural that the novella assumed a cinematic form as well. The episode film structure allowed Zavattini to draw closer to reality on multiple levels with multiple stories. And he returned to the model frequently throughout his career, collaborating with many different directors on over twelve different episode films. Between 1960 and 1965 roughly 20 episode films were produced annually. A quick glance at the credits of those films reveals that nearly every Italian director of consequence was at some point in their career involved in at least one and often multiple episode films. Zavattini's and De

Sica's innovations and experimentations with the episode film aided in the creation and promotion of a whole new genre of cinema based on the rich Italian novella tradition.

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